

# LOVE AND LIFE

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LOUISE MAUNSELL FIELD



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# LOVE AND LIFE



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BY  
LOUISE MAUNSELL FIELD



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## CONTENTS

BOOK	PAGE
I. WASHINGTON SQUARE, NORTH . . . . .	I
II. LIVINGSTON PLACE . . . . .	99
III. WEST HILLSDALE . . . . .	139
IV. RIVERSIDE DRIVE . . . . .	183
V. STUYVESANT PARK . . . . .	219





BOOK I  
WASHINGTON SQUARE, NORTH



# LOVE AND LIFE

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## BOOK I

### WASHINGTON SQUARE, NORTH

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#### CHAPTER FIRST

WHEN Paul Frear, archaeologist, invalid and recluse, died at the early age of forty-seven, it was with the gratifying conviction that he was leaving his only daughter, if not rich, at any rate very well off. Else he never would have appointed his affluent step-sister, Honoria, and her yet more affluent husband, Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, sixth of the name, his executors and Lynneth's guardians.

But Paul Frear's knowledge of the ancient Greeks was excelled only by his ignorance of the modern stock-promoter. The bundles of certificates found in his safe deposit box proved valuable merely as testimonials to the fecundity of the human imagination. A very small amount of ready money and the old white house among the New England hills, in which he had secluded himself after the motor accident which crippled him and killed his young wife, were the sole negotiable portions of Lynneth's inheritance.

Which partly explains why a frown slowly deepened

on Mrs. Bleecker Hetherington's usually serene forehead as she listened, one November evening some eight months after Paul Frear's death, to the concluding sentences of the letter her husband was reading aloud:

"... So you see I shall have to come to New York. There is no work for me here, and I must begin to earn my living at once. Please remember me to Aunt Honoria, and believe me,

"Sincerely and gratefully yours, Lynneth Frear."

Carefully folding the letter Mr. Hetherington replaced it in his lizard-skin pocket-book, took off his gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and demanded with much deliberation and no small amount of acidity; "Well, Honoria! What do you think about that?"

But Blazius Bleecker Hetherington's second wife—he had been a widower with an only child when he married Honoria van Sturtevant—though by no means a clever woman, was an extremely prudent one. She was not yet ready to commit herself; she temporized.

"It's evident the girl has made up her mind," she responded slowly.

"Quite so; quite so. It's putting me in a very awkward position, very awkward indeed! What will people say if I allow a twenty-year-old girl, my wife's niece—oh yes; I know she isn't actually your niece, but that's what everybody will call her—to go traipsing around the city looking for a job?" Mr. Hetherington spoke as one whose just grievance no rational person could deny.

"It wouldn't be particularly pleasant for me, either," asserted Mrs. Hetherington ruminatively. Absence of imagination makes difficult the weighing even of precise and manifest evils.

They had dined alone that evening, and were now having coffee in the library of the big, old-fashioned house on the north side of Washington Square, built in a characteristically solid and prosaic manner by Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, Third. Much of the substantial

rosewood furniture had belonged to the yet older family residence on Bowling Green, and from the white pan-nelled walls the portraits of by-gone Bleeckers and Hetheringtons — Roman-nosed, stiffly starched matrons and high-collared patriarchs—gazed with austere approbation upon the couple they had watched pass from a calm and prosperous youth into an even more calm and prosperous middle-age. Through the tall windows, heavily curtained and valanced with the massive brocades which had already survived at least two generations, the noises of the outer world came muffled and sullen.

“What does the child fancy she can do?” Mrs. Hetherington’s habitual placidity had been partly restored during the pause which enabled her to reach a decision. But she was still tapping her black velvet covered lap with the platinum lorgnon hanging from her neck on a diamond-studded chain—an unfailing symptom of mental disturbance, as her husband very well knew.

“It appears she acted as her father’s secretary, and has an idea of doing something of the sort in an office. I thought she’d stay on with those nice old ladies. They were willing to keep her, and I wouldn’t have objected to paying her board. It would have been so much more suitable! and she likes living in the country.”

This was not a deliberate falsehood; merely a supposition based on knowledge of what would contribute most to his own well-being.

Another moment’s reflection: then Mrs. Hetherington suggested mildly: “Why not have her come to us?”

“My dear Honoria! The fact that your father, a widower, married her father’s mother, a widow, doesn’t make her a member of Our Family!”

“There isn’t any blood relationship, of course. But Paul and I were brought up like brother and sister.” Mrs. Hetherington’s mildness was as the mildness of milk.

“Quite so; quite so. But after he quarrelled with your



father you were estranged for years. You never even heard from him until after he was dead!"

Mr. Hetherington referred, not to any spiritualistic communication from the defunct Paul, but to that clause in his will which appointed his step-sister and her husband joint guardians of Lynneth.

Mrs. Hetherington's placidity was not equal to the task of perfectly concealing her embarrassment, the embarrassment of one who ordinarily avoided emotions as sedulously as she did contagious diseases. The tapping of the lorgnon was quicker than her words, her voice uncertain, and very low: "I'm not sure I was right about all that. I've often thought I ought perhaps to have done something when Paul's wife died. Written to him, or—or something. And at the last he did think of me."

Mr. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington—in his college days ironically nick-named "Blazing Bleeck"—suppressed an undignified desire to snort. But he had never yet failed in politeness to this second wife of his, and would not now.

"Quite so, my dear, quite so," he said hurriedly, vaguely wondering whether he ought not to pat her hand. They were an undemonstrative couple, and her barely articulate implications of regret and scruple were disconcerting to them both. But then there was in this matter of Paul Frear's daughter so much that was disconcerting and unpleasant! They were accustomed to a successful evading of the unpleasant.

"I think Lynneth had better come to us, at least for a while," Mrs. Hetherington went on more confidently. "I'll need some one to help me with the lists and things for Lisa's wedding, and she can take Esther Lamont's place as bridesmaid. No one need know she hasn't been in mourning for a year or two. She's never been anywhere, or had any good times. I'd like to give her a chance."

A chance to marry, understood. The business of earn-



ing a living was no doubt entirely proper, admirable even, for ordinary young women—was not Mrs. Hetherington chairman of the Board of Lady Managers of a Working Girls' Home?—but other standards must be applied to one who was, no matter how remotely, related to Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, born Honoria van Sturtevant.

Mr. Hetherington made a very slight gesture with the plump and well-tended hand in which he held a plump and particularly choice cigar. His starched shirt-front creaked as he sighed inaudibly; "You never can tell what a girl will take it into her head to do, my dear. Look at Lisa!"

Mr. Hetherington's elder daughter, the only child of his long dead, almost forgotten first wife, was soon to be married to a young man possessed of good looks, expensive tastes, little money, and no occupation.

"That's different!" There was a subcurrent of unconscious triumph in Mrs. Hetherington's tone; she instinctively seized the opportunity to score off her predecessor. "If Lisa's mother hadn't left her so much money—! Lynneth hasn't anything. Besides, Phil Armytage is really rather charming. His great-grandmother was a Ravenel of Virginia, and he's devoted to Lisa!"

Mr. Hetherington did not respond. He was usually ready to bestow the *cachet* of his gracious approbation upon that Providence which had demonstrated its wisdom by giving him an ample fortune, an aristocratic old name, a handsome wife and one rarely beautiful daughter, Valerie, child of this second wife. Yet there were times when its bounties fell provokingly short of his just expectations—as they had certainly done in this affair of Lisa's engagement. Now an idea entered his mind and he spoke slowly, contemplating the tip of his cigar, and avoiding his wife's eyes:

"Well, my dear, if you need some one to help you, I

see no reason why Lynneth shouldn't prove useful. You might write and make her the offer. She's very proud, and I'm sure she'll be much happier if she's doing a little something for you, in return for all you'll be doing for her."

He paused, seeming to give his entire attention to the neat bestowal of his cigar ash in the small bronze bowl waiting to receive it. Outwardly he presented the serene aspect of a portly, middle-aged gentleman whose existence had so far been as generally satisfactory as the excellent dinner he had recently consumed. Yet he felt ashamed.

His apparently peaceful life was the battleground of two passions; a desire to stand well in the eyes of his fellows, and a longing to save money. His vanity and his affection for his second wife had nearly always been able to defeat his constitutional stinginess; but the moments when some petty economy made it possible for him to avoid the spending of a few pennies were happy ones to Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, Sixth. His wife never dreamed that he agonized over the bills he paid in Spartan silence, nor suspected that the reason his regular lunch consisted of a glass of buttermilk was not exclusively hygienic.

Honorina Hetherington, to whom having money to spend and air to breathe were about equally matters of course, took her husband's remark at its face value.

"What a wonderfully considerate and understanding person you are, Bleecker! After Lynneth's been in New York a little while she'll get over all these childish ideas of hers about being independent and earning her own living, and realize that that sort of thing simply won't do."

"Quite so; quite so," Mr. Hetherington answered a little hastily. "But what will Valerie say?"

The beauty of this younger daughter, sole offspring of his second matrimonial venture, often seemed to him

conclusive proof that Providence fully understood what was righteously due to a Bleecker Hetherington.

His wife's slightly prominent, china-blue eyes met his complacently.

"Valerie?" she repeated. "Oh, Valerie won't mind! It will be nice for her to have a companion. She wouldn't admit it for the world—you know how she is!—but I'm sure she'll miss Lisa sadly."

Mr. Hetherington made no answer. They had been married nearly a quarter of a century, but there were still times when he, though not a particularly discerning person, was almost dumbfounded by his wife's extraordinary talent for remaining completely and honestly blind to whatever it would, or might, be disagreeable for her to perceive. That sisters, even half-sisters, invariably loved each other was a part of the code of conventions she accepted without question. She would not have worn a ready-made glove; but ready-made opinions save so much trouble!

"Lynneth had better come to us next week," she flowed on blandly. "That will give me time to get her a few things before the rush begins; I don't suppose she has anything fit to wear. Then during December I'll have a luncheon or two, and introduce her formally—unless Valerie'd prefer a tea dance."

Mr. Hetherington winced. 'A' usually considerate destiny had certainly played him the shabbiest of tricks in permitting Paul Frear to die and leave an all but penniless young daughter, of whom it was necessary—and so obtrusively necessary!—that some one should take care. If only this inconvenient and probably expensive Lynneth had some half suitable place to go to—or any place at all, for that matter, except No. — Washington Square, North!



## CHAPTER SECOND

SLIPPING hastily out of bed, Lynneth pattered across the floor on little bare feet and drew up the dark blind which shaded the tall, old-fashioned window. Her first morning in New York, her first daylight glimpse of the Enchanted City—! She thrilled at the thought.

A perfectly unexciting prospect of staid backyards wherein a marauding grey cat was the sole adventurer somewhat chilled her enthusiasm, and she returned to her small warm hollow beneath the blankets, piling up the pillows behind her so that she might more easily look about the pretty room, with its creamy walls and daffodil-flowered chintzes, which for a little while was all her very own.

But only for a little while, she sternly reminded herself. She wasn't going to be dependent on any one! Though there was no reason why she shouldn't spend a month or so with this kindly Aunt Honoria of hers, here in Washington Square, especially when Aunt Honoria needed her help with the arrangements for Lisa's wedding. She sighed involuntarily. Somehow, excursions into the business world seemed less alluring now, than when viewed from the isolated little village among the bleak New England hills. The opulent luxury of this aristocratic old house, so stately and quiet and peaceful——

Peaceful?

She snuggled her slim little shoulders further down into the lavender-scented pillows, as if trying to retreat from the memory which pestered her like an insistent mosquito. She wouldn't pay a scrap of attention to it. Ten chances to one it was only fancy, anyway. Her

imagination, excited by novelty, had been playing pranks.

And how new to her it all was, from the drive down glistening, rain-swept Fifth Avenue in the Rolls-Royce limousine to this awakening between monogram-embroidered linen sheets! As far back as she could remember she had lived in the barren and forbidding house to which her father retreated when his injured spine rendered him incapable of continuing those explorations among Egyptian ruins which were the centre of all his ambitions. The commentaries on Aeschylus which brought praise from scholars all over the world seemed to him a poor substitute for his chosen work—almost as poor a substitute as the daughter he tolerated was for the wife he had devotedly loved, and to whose memory he was completely faithful.

Lynneth's only other associates had been the Misses Quincy, a pair of ex-schoolmistresses to whose unsophisticated minds New York was a veritable sink of iniquity, compared with which Sodom was chaste and Gomorrah absolutely Puritanical. They had done their conscientious best to instil this belief into Lynneth, thereby rousing her curiosity and making her feel that in going to Washington Square she was beginning a wonderful adventure, deliciously spiced with all sorts of mysterious dangers.

Memory of her one short interview with Mrs. Hetherington did not, it is true, recall anything noticeably exciting about that serene and substantial matron; but Lynneth's was a hopeful nature. She had only the most nebulous idea of what she might expect to find in New York, but it was something romantic and glamorous and enthralling, something quite, quite different from the deadly dull routine which was all she had ever known. Terrible, perhaps; but certainly neither monotonous nor sordid, and if evil, then of a splendid sulphurous wickedness appropriate to defiant Lucifer, once Son of the Morning.

She pushed the dense shadowy masses of soft dark hair back from her low forehead and the small pale face which often seemed to be all big grey eyes, eyes eager with the grave and earnest eagerness of an enquiring child, full of the unconscious pathos of youth robbed of its playtime. Her arrival the night before, the five people she had met at the dinner she was too excited to eat—she tried to sort out her impressions of these with the impatient haste of an intuitive, impetuous mind drilled to methodical habits. She did not realize how artificial these habits were, nor that her craving for change and excitement was but a very simple hunger for the love and joy her youth had so far been denied. She had been constrained to plod when her instinct was to dance.

A tap on the door and her automatic "Come in!" were immediately followed by the entrance of Parkins, the severely competent maid who immediately after her arrival had taken autocratic possession of her keys, unpacking her meagre belongings and stowing them away with intimidating swiftness and precision.

"Miss Valerie told me to see if you was awake, Miss. An' to ask if you'd have breakfast with her in the sittin' room in fifteen minutes."

In an entirely respectful manner, the maid managed to convey the impression that a request from Miss Valerie was a royal command. Also that she, Parkins, regarded the newcomer as an intruder and a worm.

"Please tell her I'll be there," replied Lynne with dignity.

"Very good, Miss. I'll close the windows and draw your bath first, Miss."

Here was luxury for you! No getting up in a cold room and shivering through the length of an unheated hall to the bathroom, faintly hoping the water might be at least lukewarm—which it never was! Through the now open door she could see the snowy porcelain tub



with the shower above it, the glittering silver racks holding sponge and delicately-scented French soap and huge soft fuzzy Turkish towels. Her outing-flannel kimono, thickened and faded with many washings, and the shapeless slippers Miss Hannah Quincy had crocheted for her last Christmas looked startlingly out of place in these surroundings. But they seemed still more out of place when, fresh and fragrant from the bath into which she had breathlessly ventured to put some of the fascinatingly tinted bath-salts she had found ready in a big glass jar, and with her dark hair hanging in two thick braids, she entered the little sitting room she had been told she was to share with Valerie. She would have liked to put on her dress and do up her hair, but the fifteen minutes were over, and she had been taught that to be late was to be ill-bred.

The room was empty. A wood fire crackled blithely on the hearth, and before it stood a small table, laid for two. On the mantelshelf a French gilt clock ticked energetically.

Its mercury-weighted pendulum swung back and forth, back and forth. No Valerie. Back and forth, back and forth. Still no Valerie. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed. . . .

Lynneth was wondering whether she could have mistaken the room when a door opened. And then she caught her breath, just as she had caught her breath the previous evening, when for the first time she saw that dazzling, white-and-gold vision which was Valerie van Sturtevant Hetherington.

Her admiration was undisguised, and Valerie smiled, well pleased. This dainty little cousin was evidently ready to think her perfect, and it is always agreeable and frequently useful to be thought perfect. Appreciatively conscious of her own unrivalled loveliness, she sauntered across the room, and putting one rosy-tipped finger under



Lynneth's chin turned up the wistfully eager little face and lightly kissed the parted lips.

"I foresee," she declared playfully, "I foresee we're going to be great friends, you and I!"

She made no apology for her tardiness, nor did it occur to Lynneth to expect one.

"Oh, I do hope we are!" she exclaimed eagerly, flushing a little in her earnestness.

She looked at Valerie with admiring eyes. Lavishly over-paying a bit of kindness whose cost she never thought of reckoning, she was ready to do anything that might please the wonderful being who bestowed it. She had known only the tepid affection of the Misses Quincy, and her father's impatient acceptance of her as, on the whole, a convenience. And while it may be quite possible to do good to those who persecute you, it is, to say the least, extremely difficult to love those who tolerate you.

Valerie smiled charmingly. "I was sure of it last night, the minute I came into the room!" Slipping a smooth round arm about Lynneth's shoulders, she turned to the maid. "Everything ready, Parkins? Very well; that's all now. I'll ring when I want you. We'll have a nice cosy time, just by ourselves," she added as the maid left the room, and without waiting for a reply, went on; "I knew you were a perfect dear, as soon as I looked at you. Honestly now, what did you think of me?"

"I thought you were the most beautiful thing——" Lynneth broke off abruptly, blushing at her own impetuous frankness.

Valerie smiled again. No doubting the sincerity of that exclamation! Yet she asked with calculated curiosity; "And what else? You saw and thought something else, I'm sure. What was it?"

Lynneth hesitated, a touch of dismay shadowing her expressive face. Valerie, slowly sipping orange-juice strained and chilled to precisely the right temperature,

watched her with guileless-seeming, madonna-blue eyes, and saw the shadow deepen.

For Lynneth knew what Valerie meant, and she hadn't expected anything like this—a crisis in its own small way. Her almost cloistered life had denied her the social training which makes dexterous avoidance of such minor crises nearly instinctive. Yet how admit what she had, not so much thought as felt at that instant when, already seated at the oblong table in the great dining room, facing Lisa and Lisa's fiancé, Philip Armytage, she had witnessed Valerie's belated entrance and then, turning suddenly, caught the look in the elder sister's eyes?

It was the memory of that glance which had made her hesitate to call the fine old house "peaceful."

Had the only partly understood impression, an impression registered more on her nerves than on her brain, been a little less profound, she would quickly have discovered some euphuism to cover her thoughts. But the look in Lisa's eyes had been as startling as the abrupt unveiling of something malignant and festering, something whose very existence was a threat.

"What else could I have been thinking?" she replied; and knew that her brief pause had betrayed her.

Valerie put aside her empty glass. She too paused a moment. Her blue eyes had a Greuze-like innocence; "I wasn't sure you'd seen—or would understand if you did see."

"Whether I'd seen? And understood?" Lynneth's question was very nearly a demand. To her impatient young frankness this dialogue of indirect reply and veiled suggestion was both alien and irksome. She wanted Valerie either to leave the matter alone, or to put into words what she still faintly hoped she had misunderstood.

Valerie's glance was half-appraising, half-amused. She turned the tiny ivory spigot of the Queen Anne coffee urn, and as the clear brown stream flowed smoothly into

the old Chinese porcelain cups, replied with a casualness which seemed to deny her words; "The sad and simple fact that Lisa hates me."

For the moment she left it there. "One lump, or two?" she asked pleasantly.

"Two, please."

"You're not shocked at my admitting it, are you? You'd be sure to find out before long, living in the house. She really does hate me, you know; and after all, why shouldn't she? I've always put her in the shade, ever since we were little mites of children. Of course, it's not my fault. *I* can't help it if I'm—well, rather better-looking than she is! But I don't blame her one scrap, and I'd be friends with her if she'd let me. After all, if I'm prettier, she's got a big income of her own, and I haven't a penny. Her mother left her lots of money."

"Her mother?" the surprised Lynneth repeated.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know my father married twice? Lisa's mother died when she was born, and a year or so later he married my mother. I'm only about two years younger than Lisa. Of course," she added smilingly, "if father hadn't married again, Lisa'd have been mistress of his house, and inherited all he's got, and *I* wouldn't have been here to interfere with her. Honestly, I don't wonder she hates me! I guess I'd feel as she does if I were in her place, though I'd never do what she's going to. Don't you think it's awfully foolish?"

"Think what's foolish?"

"For her to marry Phil Armytage."

"I don't know anything about it. Why do you call it foolish?" Lynneth's reply was instinctively defensive.

But it was not so much Lisa as her own dreams of romance that she defended. A betrothal was to her the key to an enchanted garden. . . .

Valerie's deprecating gesture was grace itself. "Oh,



my dear!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean to say—honestly, haven't you noticed? He's not one bit in love with her."

"Then why——?"

"The usual reason! He hasn't a cent, and Lisa's a great catch. That's why."

"How perfectly disgusting!" flashed Lynneth indignantly.

Again Valerie smiled. "Oh, well—! It's give and take. Lots of people marry without caring much about each other, and get along all right. If Phil wasn't—wasn't Phil, it might be safe enough. Don't you think he's awfully good-looking?"

"Ye-es. In a way. But— Does Lisa know? If she cares——"

"If she cares! But does she? I doubt it!—Have another muffin, won't you?—You see, he's a great flirt, and awfully popular. Lots of girls are wild about him, and, of course, it's always fun to get hold of a man other girls want. Besides, Lisa's crazy to leave home, and have her own establishment, and do as she likes. Of course, she could quit now, but that would mean a dreadful row with father, and if he got angry enough, he might cut her out of his will. Father and mother are dreadfully old-fashioned and awfully fussy about what we do and where we go, and I don't know how much all that counts with Lisa. . . . Wonder if I could find out? It might be fun to try!"

Lynneth was too inexperienced to form any precise idea of the methods Valerie might use in such an attempt, but intuition told her that the attempt itself would be a summons to disaster.

"Couldn't your mother do something?" she asked, feeling as if she had been hurried into a drama's second act without having learned anything about her part, and a good deal excited by the hint of coming complications.

"Mother? Why, she's convinced that Lisa and I are

devoted sisters, and Phil an adoring lover! She'd be perfectly miserable if she suspected a quarter of what I've told you. That's one reason why I did tell you—so you shouldn't say anything to upset her," concluded Valerie, pleased by this idea of an affectionate consideration for her mother's feelings which had just occurred to her. That other self which is in all of us, the self that sits apart, was applauding her conduct of this seemingly unimportant interview.

Lynneth nodded gravely. Nearly twenty years of almost steady repression had made her a rather silent person.

Valerie rose and stood a moment, idly playing a tattoo on the back of her chair with a pair of slender, shapely hands. Her flawless, milk-and-roses complexion and hair which had the softness and colour of ripe corn-silk could brave the sunlight now flooding the room. A more experienced observer might have seen defects in that alluring face, might have thought the rosy mouth self-indulgent, the blue eyes hard beneath their apparent softness; but to Lynneth it was perfect. Beautiful, charming, lovely and lovable, Valerie seemed to her all that she herself would have liked to be.

And this adorable princess talked of being "great friends" with her!

"I was sure you'd understand," Valerie said, slowly and not too definitely. "You see, Lynneth dear, no one can be both my friend, and Lisa's. It's a pity, but—oh well, there it is! And I want you for mine."

Lynneth's grey eyes, that looked so dark with their black-pencilled irids and long, thickly curling lashes, were shining now.

"I'm glad," she said quietly.

She too had risen and stood, a shabby, rather quaint little figure in the old washed-out kimono, her soft wavy hair parted over the broad white forehead where the dark eyebrows made a clear, delicately curved line above

the steady eyes. Lashes and brows emphasized the pallour she owed to a youth spent tethered to the desk where she tried to satisfy the exactions of an irritable invalid.

Valerie looked down, smilingly, into the sensitive, up-turned face. Suddenly, with a movement really beautiful in its long-limbed grace, she swept the younger girl into her arms, and kissed her lightly. It meant nothing to her, that swift embrace; but it meant a great deal to Lynneth.

“There!” Valerie exclaimed with a little laugh, and glancing at the clock, added; “Now I must dress—I’m going to ride in the Park. Wish you were coming with me! Oh, by the way, mother said to tell you she’d like you to be ready to go out with her at half-past ten. All right, Parkins! I’m coming!”

## CHAPTER THIRD

A BREATHLESS scramble enabled Lynneth to be ready at the designated hour. Endowed with the magic knack some few thrice-blessed women possess, she could dress in a whirlwind and look as if she had done it amid perfect calm.

This time she was not kept waiting. Mrs. Hetherington approved her punctuality, and remarked upon it graciously.

"It may be an old-fashioned virtue, my dear, but a lady is always considerate, and I've taught my girls never to be late for any engagement, no matter how trivial." She settled herself in the tan-upholstered limousine, gave the footman an address, and went serenely on; "I thought we'd do a little shopping this morning, and get you a few of the things you need most. You must have a tailored suit, and a couple of little frocks, and some hats, and one or two evening gowns at once. Later we can attend to the rest."

Lynneth caught her breath. Never in her life had she had more than one new garment at a time—and the times had been few, and very far between. The prospect of a whole new wardrobe, all at once, was dizzying. Then she remembered:

"But, Aunt Honoria, I can't possibly afford——"

Mrs. Hetherington would not allow her to finish. "My dear, you must let me have my way. I was—er—very fond of your father, and I'd like to do something for you. Besides, those stocks he left you may prove valuable after all; one never knows what the market will do!" Her placid glance wandered slowly over Lynneth's plain little hat, shabby coat, and skirt which had been



laboriously, and not very successfully dyed at home in the washboiler. "You can't go through a New York winter without suitable clothing."

"But, Aunt Honoria, it's only for such a very little while! I'll have to find some sort of work——"

"Oh, well—! Some day, perhaps. There's plenty of time for that." Mrs. Hetherington dismissed the subject in a way which made Lynneth feel as if she had been somehow indelicate. "I've arranged for you to take a few dancing lessons. You must learn the new steps. I don't want my niece"—the excellent matron was unaware of her slight emphasis on the possessive pronoun—"I don't want my niece to be a wall-flower."

Lynneth caught most of the implications of this speech. Ignorant of the details of the long estrangement between her father and his step-sister, she yet did not altogether miss the faint suggestion of Mrs. Hetherington's—not quite remorse, but rather mental discomfort. And she perfectly comprehended her determination that her niece should not be any discredit to her.

She glanced thoughtfully at the older woman; the second wife. Did she, she wondered, often think of that other, whose place she held? Was she ever aware that her husband was comparing her with that other? Or had he forgotten the dead? But how could he forget, while Lisa was there—Lisa, who hated Valerie, hated the daughter of the woman who had taken her mother's place, and in some measure, her own!

The big car rolled smoothly along lower Fifth Avenue, past the few blocks of old-fashioned residences and tall modern apartment houses, the clanging, glittering cheapness of Fourteenth Street, and the wholesale establishments which of late years have so changed the character of Broadway, as well as Fifth Avenue, between Fourteenth and Thirty-fourth Streets. They left the wedge-shaped Flatiron Building—at which Lynneth stared with eager curiosity—far behind, and came at last to where

a famous hotel and no less famous department store mark the beginning of one of the greatest shopping districts in the world.

Everything she saw fascinated Lynneth; the crowds which made her suppose there must be a parade or something special going on until Mrs. Hetherington assured her to the contrary; the splendid shops with their bewildering allurements of jewels and flowers and bonbons, of sumptuous furs and lustrous fabrics, gathered from Asia and from France, from Africa and from Alaska. It was thrilling! More wonderful even than her imaginings!

She was almost sorry when they turned down a side street in the upper Forties, and stopped in front of what she took to be a large private house, with a single name cut deep in the stone lintel over the door. It was a surprise to discover that this was a ladies' tailoring establishment. Conducted into a small cubicle, she was asked to take off her coat while a jerky little man with a tiny, very black moustache did mysterious things with a tape measure, murmuring the results to an assistant. Then she must consult with her aunt over styles and materials—which meant assenting to Mrs. Hetherington's selection of a tobacco-brown tweed, to be made with rigid plainness, a choice the little man accepted with an air of profound respect.

After the tailor, the dressmaker. Rainbow-hued gowns that were fascinating marvels of crispness, or fluffiness, or softly flowing drapery were displayed on living models who moved over the pale grey velvet carpet with an air of languid sophistication which made Lynneth feel appallingly young and crude. Mrs. Hetherington and the suave, swarthy-browed madame who was the ruling spirit of the place discussed the merits of each confection, madame at last declaring that she understood what was desired:

“*Parfaitement!* A gown of youth, *d’une simplicité exquise*. Your *petite nièce*, madame, ah, but she is truly *jeune fille!* You do not have *la jeune fille* here in your so wonderful *Amérique!* Behold! For her I shall create *ze costume ravissante!* It shall be white, *gentille, fraîche comme une fleur*——!”

“Yes, for her *début*. But she must have something at once. Now that shell-pink tulle—if you filled in the *décolletage* a little?”

The shell-pink tulle was bought—for the trifling sum of \$175—also a crisp, grey-blue taffeta, trimmed with tiny roses, in which mademoiselle was pronounced “*Charmante!*”

The question of an evening wrap was next considered, and when Lynneth shyly admitted her preference for a very simple one of silky white fur, madame applauded her so excellent taste! Fur is expensive; so is simplicity; the cost of the two combined would have stupefied Lynneth had she known it. Two hats, an old-rose *crêpe de Chine* afternoon gown, and four blouses to be worn with the tailored suit were enough for the present, Mrs. Hetherington said. Unless madame had some plain little frock mademoiselle could put on immediately?

Madame had; and when Lynneth emerged from the dressing-room in the smartest and simplest of dark blue *tricotine* utility gowns, with a small hat to match, equally simple and equally smart, Mrs. Hetherington smiled her approval. The discarded clothing packed up and stowed away in the limousine, she glanced at her wrist-watch:

“It’s nearly half-past one, my dear, and I’m sure you must be hungry. We’ll go to the Plaza for lunch.”

Feeling as if she had stepped into a fairy tale, and stealing shy, delighted glances at her transformed self whenever they passed a mirror, Lynneth followed her aunt into the hotel. The dining room was crowded, but the headwaiter contrived, as headwaiters somehow al-



ways did contrive, to find a table for Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, and Lynneth was soon busy with her first restaurant meal.

She was hungry, and the unfamiliar food delicious. Having a healthy young liking for good things to eat, she enjoyed it heartily; but enjoyed still more the novelty of her surroundings. She watched the other women, simply, superbly or astonishingly gowned, wondered at some of the fragments of conversation that reached her during an occasional lull in the music, and absorbed the matter-of-course extravagance, the bland, ultra-sophisticated luxuriousness of it all at every unaccustomed pore. The room seemed to her palatial, the music extraordinary, the women too marvelous to be real. Their furs and jewels, their general air of daintily expensive Epicureanism, fascinated her as much as did their frank use of powder pad and lip-stick. She had read about such things; she had never seen them until now.

After luncheon was over Mrs. Hetherington, still conscientiously doing her duty, took her for a short motor run up Fifth Avenue and through Central Park, returning by way of Riverside Drive. As conscientiously she replied to Lynneth's shyly eager questions, though her answers were sometimes rather unsatisfactory. When the girl asked, for instance, who lived in the huge apartment houses towering along the river-front, her reply was a brief: "People nobody knows, my dear."

That recalled the Misses Quincy's remarks about New York, as well as certain fragments of Lynneth's desultory reading, which had included every book she could manage to get her hands on. Were all those dreadfully wicked creatures congregated together along the line of the river? The presence of many baby carriages and innumerable small children did give the Drive a factitious air of innocence, but then, as Lynneth sagely reflected, babies might occur even in the worst-regulated households!

Though fast-crowding impressions were bewildering her a little, she was sorry when Mrs. Hetherington said:

"We must go home now, my dear. I always make a point of being at home on Fridays after half-past four. Lisa and Valerie stay in when they can, but the people who come are mostly my friends. Perhaps you'll help me with the tea? It's all very informal."

So at half-past four Lynneth ran lightly down stairs, dressed in the pretty new rose-coloured gown which made her eyes look very clear and dark. In the hall she met the butler, a benign person whose mien of a retired Archbishop made him a valuable acquisition to any establishment.

"Is Mrs. Hetherington in the drawing-room, Wilbur?"

"I think not, Miss. But I'm sure she'll be there immediately."

He drew back one of the heavy portières, and Lynneth entered the great room. Like so many of its contemporaries, No. — Washington Square had been built with both a back and a front drawing-room. The throwing of these two into one at the time of Lisa's début had been among the few alterations made by its present owners.

On the cream-pannelled walls the place of honour was held by a fine Sir Peter Lely portrait of that young Richard Hetherington who had given his life for an unworthy King at the battle of Marston Moor. From the ceilings depended the two beautiful old chandeliers of tinkling, prismatic glass which had hung there ever since the house was built; the furniture, highly polished and upholstered in antique silken tapestry, belonged to a yet earlier period. It was a fine old room, stately in its proportions, harmonious in its fittings. It greeted you ceremoniously, as with the tips of its fingers. Even the fires burning in the grates under the high, carved stone mantelpieces at either end could not make it warmly welcoming.

Mrs. Hetherington soon appeared, and a moment later

Wilbur ushered in two ladies, the one old and autocratic, the other middle-aged and subdued. Lynneth had risen at their entrance and remained standing until she was presented to them, with the explanation:

"My step-brother Paul was a great scholar, you know, dear Mrs. van Cortlandt. He loved the country, and this is the first time Lynneth has been to New York."

Mrs. van Cortlandt raised a long-handled, gold-mounted eye-glass. "How very fortunate for her! New York is no place in which to bring up a young girl nowadays. It was different when *I* was young. Then you knew every one, who they were and all about them. In these times, it is quite impossible to tell what sort of person you may meet."

Mrs. Hetherington shook her head in placid sympathy. "I've often heard my dear mother say that in her young days you knew every one who kept a carriage. Then the riff-raff confined themselves to politics and things like that, but now you meet their sons and daughters in the very best houses."

"I remember when my father thought of building just above Forty-second Street—" Mrs. van Cortlandt began, only to be interrupted by the arrival of two matrons whose sables should have commanded respect anywhere. But Lynneth noticed that Mrs. van Cortlandt spoke to them very coldly, and that even her elderly daughter, whose clothes seemed to bear no relation to any of the prevailing fashions, treated them with frosty politeness. The van Cortlandt code, as Lynneth later discovered, still demanded disapproval of those renegades who allied themselves with mushroom millionaires.

The first arrivals departed, other guests came, and the pontifical butler and scarcely less impressive footman were kept busy passing sandwiches and tiny cakes. The last of these visitors were leaving when Valerie entered. Phil Armytage was with her.

"I lunched with Lily Gresham and we went on to the



Skating Club," she explained. "Phil was there, and I made him come back to tea."

"Quite right, darling. Lynneth, will you pour for a while? I want to show Mrs. Vance and Mrs. Cathcart the miniatures in the library."

Lynneth obeyed. Phil and Valerie went to the fireplace at the other end of the room and stood together, stretching their hands to the blaze and talking in an undertone interspersed with laughter. From her post behind the tea table Lynneth surveyed the pair, and decided that she didn't like Mr. Armytage. He was handsome; dark-haired, slimly built, foreign-looking. Too handsome for a man, she thought—and smiled to herself, admitting her prejudice.

Valerie and he seemed to have a good deal to say to each other. Evidently they didn't want to be interrupted! A look of mirthful resignation passed between them when the portière was again pushed aside and Lisa came in, followed by two men, one young, the other middle-aged.

Their resemblance to each other made more cruel the contrast between the half-sisters. Lisa's fair hair would not have looked so drab and lustreless had Valerie's been dark instead of a rippling golden yellow; the modeling of her face would not have seemed so crude, had its outlines been less like a badly drawn sketch of Valerie's. But their eyes were absolutely different; Valerie's large, madonna-blue, Lisa's narrow, somewhat slanting, of a pale tint neither grey nor yellow, but wholly neutral. And yet they were very keen. They brought a word into Lynneth's mind; the word "snatch."

Lisa paused a moment, smiling at the couple standing in front of the fire; her smile was acrid.

"I'm so glad you two have made friends at last," she said. Her voice was thin, metallic, without depth or resonance. "You know, Mr. Lawrence, my sister and Mr. Armytage are rival beauties. They're both too fond

of flattery to be willing to give it, so how could you expect them to like each other?"

Without waiting for an answer she went to a chair, sat down, and began to peel off her long suède gloves. A suggestion of cruelty entered somehow into the commonplace action. The younger man who had come in with her she ignored as coolly as she did Lynneth.

"Don't let your raptures spoil your manners, Lisa dear," Valerie retorted. "You haven't introduced Lynneth to Mr. Lawrence or Mr.—er——?"

"Calhoun—Danvers Calhoun," responded the younger man, trying to appear at ease and failing noticeably.

"Thanks! Lynneth, Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Calhoun. My cousin, Miss Frear. Here's the tea. Now, Lynnie darling, if you'll make yourself useful until mother comes?"

Four of the little party assembled at one end of the long room were grateful for Valerie's intervention. Armytage, Lawrence and Calhoun, differing in most ways, shared the general masculine dread of "a scene." They were more relieved even than Lynneth, who held, or thought she held, in Valerie's explanation at breakfast the key to Lisa's behaviour. And again she felt as if she had been pushed into the middle of a drama.

Mrs. Hetherington reappeared, placid and smiling. Resuming her place behind the tea tray:

"We've had a very busy day, Lynneth and I," she remarked with the air of one to whom others' interest in her affairs was a matter of course: "We shopped all morning, and then took a little turn through the Park and down by the river. I think Riverside Drive is so pleasant at this time of the year. Don't you, Mr. Calhoun?"

"Yes, indeed. I wish I could get there more often. I'm always meaning to go. I scarcely know the district at all," Calhoun answered, conveniently forgetting that when first he came to New York he had boarded in a



house in the West Nineties. He spoke with that slight flatness of enunciation, that use of "wich" and "wat" in place of "which" and "what" which is an almost ineradicable trace of early training—or lack of training.

"How it has changed, though! I remember when it was mostly vacant lots. Some people talked about its becoming a great residence section, but somehow scarcely any one has ever been willing to live there. What was it Joan Hilary said about that part of town, Valerie? Do you remember?"

"You mean her saying that Kipling proved how well he knew New York when he wrote: 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet?'"

"Yes, that's it. So clever of her! They never do, you know."

"By the way, I met Miss Hilary last night, at the opera," Ashby Lawrence remarked, dexterously balancing a sandwich on the edge of his saucer. He had been one of the half-dozen famous cotillon leaders in the days when to be a famous cotillon leader was to be a personage, and was still among the most sought-after men in New York. Rich, unmarried, of a distinguished family, his *savoir faire* was all but proverbial. As was his discretion. "What do you think of this new scheme of hers?" he added presently.

"What scheme?" Armytage asked. "I heard she was awfully hard hit a while ago in the Trans-Continental Trust smash-up."

"Yes. And then some kind friend or other persuaded her to play the market. She got in, but she couldn't get out." Lawrence summed up the situation succinctly.

"They say Miss Cordelia De Witt wanted Joan to come to her as companion. Such a pity she hasn't married! She must be—let me see—she was about eight years old when—she must be over thirty!" Mrs. Hetherington sighed. "It's a very great pity! Won't you let me give you some tea, Mr. Calhoun? You know Constance Hil-

ary, Joan's mother, was a Miss Bleecker, and a second cousin of my husband's, so though Joan has always been a trifle—er—odd, we take an interest in——”

“Miss Hilary,” announced the butler.

Pausing a moment to glance around her with the bright hazel eyes which, despite the tortoise-shell eye-glasses now dangling from her neck on a wide black ribbon, made Lynneth think of those of an observant squirrel, Joan Hilary stood in the doorway, surveying the group before her with an amusement she did not in the least try to conceal. Then carrying her great height with a kind of audacious carelessness, she strolled across to Mrs. Hetherington.

“My dear Joan, how delighted I am to see you!” exclaimed the estimable matron, for once a trifle dismayed. “You’re quite a stranger, you know. I was just saying——”

“Yes; shouldn’t have come in then, I know. Thought I’d better break the hideous tidings to you myself, though. Hello, Valerie! How are you, Lisa? Recovered from the soprano’s shrieking yet, Mr. Lawrence?”

Her casual greetings extended to Armytage and Calhoun, she glanced at Lynneth.

“So you’re Paul Frear’s daughter, are you? You look as if there might be brains somewhere in your ancestry. Come over here and let’s get acquainted,” she added imperiously, throwing her long self into a big chair.

Slouching there in an attitude so careless that only a certain inherent fineness, an innate high breeding saved it from insolence, she dominated the room. Not one of them but noticed her and turned towards her; unwillingly, it might be; yet they turned. Armytage had joined Lisa as in duty bound; Calhoun was beside Valerie. Ashby Lawrence’s glance travelled leisurely about the room, amused and quizzical. Only Lynneth, sitting alone, tacitly defied Joan, refusing to move at her bidding. An instant the steady grey eyes met those bright hazel ones,

not challengingly, but with a kind of summing-up scrutiny. And suddenly Joan smiled, and held out her hand.

"Please!" she said. . . .

As if in obedience to a given signal, the scattered groups fell into talk. Valerie was questioning Ashby Lawrence about the collection of small antique weapons—dirks and poniards, stiletos and daggers—with which he amused his too abundant leisure.

"Have you anything new that's particularly interesting?" she presently asked.

Invitations to inspect his collection, being seldom given, were regarded as extremely desirable.

"Not much. Tressel—Geoffrey Tressel, the aviator; you've heard of him, haven't you? He did some wonderful things during the war—sent me a Syrian dagger a month or two ago. It's a beautiful example of Damascus work."

"How terribly interesting!" Valerie's tone was fervent. "You know, I think I like those pretty little Italian ones best, though. Of course, I haven't seen the—the new one."

He smiled. "I'll know what to send you for a wedding present," he answered pleasantly. But he withheld the invitation for which she had been more than hinting, and turned again to Mrs. Hetherington as the footman appeared with a fresh supply of toasted scones.

"Will you take cream or lemon, Joan?" Mrs. Hetherington never forgot her duty as hostess.

"Neither, thanks. I've had tea. Like a cigarette, though. Thanks! Now then, brace yourself and take a good long breath. I'm going into trade."

"My dear Joan! What *do* you mean?"

"What I say. I'm going to open a shop."

"A shop!" repeated Mrs. Hetherington faintly.

"Yes, a shop. Knew you wouldn't be awfully keen on the idea, but there it is. Can't live on my pedigree! 'Tisn't edible. Miss De Witt wanted me to come to her,



but hanged if I propose to spend the rest of my life listening to an old woman's tales of her past glories and dry-nursing her fat poodle."

"My dear Joan!"

"Well, that's what being a companion usually amounts to." Joan's irregular nose wrinkled a little as she smiled. "Not for me, thanks! Going to start a bookshop."

"Oh, what fun!" exclaimed Lynneth eagerly, instantly responsive to the adventurous note which rang in Joan's nervous, slightly husky voice. It made her tingle. It was like coming in contact with electricity.

And afterwards as Joan with detached, mischievous amusement went on to explain some of the commercial details of her adventure, Lynneth began to wish she could talk to her quietly and alone. If only she could ask this well-poised, carelessly self-confident Miss Hilary about some of the things which puzzled her in this queer agglomeration of people and peoples called New York!

"Will you let me see you sometime?" she asked as Joan was leaving. Her shyness made the request difficult.

"Of course! Glad to. Call me up any day. Number's in the book. Don't forget! I'll count on hearing from you."

She had answered cordially, more cordially than she did a moment later when Calhoun said: "May I walk with you, Miss Hilary? I'm going your way."

But if her assent was not particularly gracious, it sufficed Calhoun. He was interested in her only as a source of information.

An idea had come to him, suggestive of profit. His acquaintance with Lisa Hetherington was of the slightest, and it was only by adroit manœuvring that he had contrived to inveigle her into asking him to tea. A keen sense of social values made him anxious to acquire a footing in the North Washington Square household.

He had come to New York from a small town in the

Southern portion of the Middle West, determined to succeed socially as well as financially. Society is willing to accept almost any young man who owns a presentable appearance and decently cut evening clothes. To these essentials, Calhoun added excellent dancing, and an astuteness which enabled him to sacrifice present amusement to future well-being. He won the favour of many wall-flowers and the anxious mammas thereof, and found it a useful factor in his social progress. He had passed from the ranks of the merely wealthy, from the would-bes and the never-will-bes, up to the smartest of the successful new-rich. But that small conservative group to which wealth is a habit and not an acquirement, and which still asks about any newcomer, "Who is he?" instead of, "How much has he?" was almost unknown to him. It might not be amusing, but it was exclusive, and he did not intend to remain among the excluded.

He had crossed the threshold. He believed he saw a way of making himself at home. And the name of it was Lynneth Frear.

"Fine old house, the Hetheringtons'! Isn't it?" he remarked as he and Joan descended the steps to the street.

"Yes. Hope they'll be able to keep it a while. Almost impossible to stay put, here in New York."

Calhoun had an instinct, frequently an asset, sometimes a liability, which led him to play up to what other people expected of him. Joan's tone had given him his cue.

"Pity, isn't it? Seems as if they enjoyed tearing down landmarks and destroying neighbourhoods. The 'Save New York' people didn't get busy soon enough."

This being one of Joan's pet grievances, they chatted amicably, and before they parted at the door of the National Arts Club, where she was dining, she had told him what he most wanted to know regarding Miss Frear.

Here, he said to himself as he left her and returned

to Fifth Avenue in search of a bus, was a heaven-sent opportunity! He was shrewd enough to realize that as an unattached young man, ready to cut in at dances and fill in at dinners he was useful; but he had none of the firmly established connections of those whose roots are thrust deep into the social soil.

Lynneth Frear had no money; the stigma of "adventurer" would not be risked in pursuit of her. Of course, the Hetheringtons hoped marriage would take her off their hands. He had done well financially, and had every prospect of doing better. They would feel kindly disposed towards one willing to rid them of a poor relation—or whom they supposed to be willing!

Yes. It would be wise to "rush" Lynneth Frear. The affair might end there, or it might not. But to be known as the man who was devoted to Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington's niece could not do him any harm, and might do him a great deal of good. What it might do to Lynneth did not enter into his calculations.

He was a young man of single purpose; that single purpose, the welfare of Danvers Calhoun.



## CHAPTER FOURTH

THE acquiring of luxurious habits is usually an effortless and always a painless process. Lynneth fell quickly and easily into the ways and routine of the great house on Washington Square—a routine which soon lost much of its glamour. To go to and fro in a motor, for instance, was at first wholly delightful, but presently began to be monotonous.

In a white mist of tulle and a quiver of excitement she had stood beside Mrs. Hetherington at the tea dance given for her début. The first of the succeeding dinners and dances and luncheons were exhilarating, but it was not long before she found a good deal of sameness about such entertainments. The girls and young men she met quickly made her aware that she was an outsider, among them only on sufferance. With scarcely an exception, they had known one another from babyhood; they had a fund of common interests and common memories; they talked a jargon of their own, full of catch-words and allusions which conveyed a great deal to them, and nothing at all to Lynneth.

The things which interested them were unknown to her. She had never been to Newport or Palm Beach or Tuxedo or Bar Harbor. She knew no more about the intimate details of their friends' lives or of the latest scandal, than if she had come straight from the moon. And she had no money with which to gamble.

Her strangeness and her inabilities she held as the reasons why she was not popular. The last thing that would have occurred to her was the idea of attributing any of her social unsuccess to Valerie, who introduced men and ostentatiously "looked after" her at dances.



Impossible for her to know that what Valerie did for her before her face was more than undone by what Valerie said about her behind her back! Such remarks as: "Do be nice to poor Linnie! Oh, I know she isn't much fun, but then——" repeated a few times, can accomplish a very great deal. Linneth was not average; and Valerie was taking no chances.

It was not as difficult for Linneth as it might have been a year or so later; in this first winter after the signing of the armistice, prohibition was only just beginning to make intoxication fashionable. But it was difficult enough, and Valerie gave her very plainly to understand that only her intervention prevented "dear little Linnie" from finding her position impossible.

Linneth believed this to be the truth. It was food on which her admiration and gratitude and affection for Valerie thrived mightily. There was, she thought, nothing she would not gladly do for that radiant princess. If only she could do something besides acting as applauding audience, and waiting patiently in the motor while Valerie "ran in" to see some friend for a moment which usually extended over an hour, or had one of the numerous and very lengthy fittings she said it made her nervous for any one to watch! If only—but what need could Valerie, Queen by right divine of beauty and of charm, have of her, who wasn't and never had been of any particular importance?

Of Lisa she saw comparatively little. And that little made her look upon her elder cousin as a person with but a single pronounced liking—a taste for erotic fiction. Stories of sexual passion, the more intimately detailed the better, were the only ones for which she cared. Once or twice she attempted to share her pleasure with Linneth, but to Paul Frear's daughter, brought up in a library which contained De Maupassant and Fielding, Théophile Gautier and Anatole France, the novels Lisa revelled in seemed merely dull, and self-consciously,

laboriously obscene. Their only effect was to increase her rapidly developing sense of hidden things going on all about her.

Often she felt as though she were walking through a fog, conscious of its existence, aware that it distorted all she saw, but unable even to guess what those things might be which were visible to her only through the refracting mist of her own inexperience. And when, as sometimes happened, a flash of light did illuminate the darkness, what it showed made her wish for the fog to close in on her again.

One of these flashes came during a dance given by a woman who was an intimate friend of Mrs. Hetherington, and the owner of one of the comparatively few private ballrooms in New York. A strict censor of what went on therein, most of the "debbies" and older girls voted her parties stodgy and lacking in "pep"; but she was too important a personage to be defied.

Lynneth had been dancing with Danvers Calhoun. Adhering to his plan, he never failed to seek her out, wherever they might be. Already Mrs. Hetherington had noticed his devotion—the wherefore of his invitation to her friend's house—and begun to wonder whether Lynneth wouldn't be wise to take him, since there didn't seem to be any immediate prospect of her doing much better.

The fox-trot had just ended when Lily Gresham stopped Lynneth. "Oh, Miss Frear, I can't find Valerie anywhere, and I'm in a tearing hurry! Will you ask her if she can go to the opera with us tomorrow night before the Rodericks' dance? and tell her to call me up and let me know?"

"Of course I will."

"Thanks awfully. 'By!"

But Valerie was nowhere to be found. She had not appeared when the next dance began, nor did she appear while it was in progress. Calhoun, who had cut in on

Jim Saunders was again with Lynne when, coming face to face with Suzanne Romeyne, an impish little person and a great chum of Valerie's, she asked; "Do you know where Valerie is, Miss Romeyne? I've a message I want to give her."

Suzanne's piquant little face sparkled mischievously. "Valerie went off in a taxi with Tony Travers. They said this party was too slow for them, and they wanted some fun. So they've gone to the Paris Roof."

The fame of the notorious Paris Roof, said "to go the limit, and then some," had long since reached Lynne's ears. A colour like the faint pink of a blush rose mounted under her transparent skin, and Calhoun told himself that she was really lovely, though in a way only a sophisticated taste like his own could appreciate.

"Don't look so troubled," he said consolingly, slipping his arm about her as the music began again. "Lots of girls run away for a ride or go and have a gay time at places like the Paris Roof when their mothers think they're at perfectly proper parties. Your cousin will turn up all right. See if she doesn't."

"Aunt Honoria's so particular——"

"Well, there it is, you know! Girls want to—well, to see life, and most of them are wise to a lot their mothers never even dream of. They don't like to shock the poor old dears, so they just hold their tongues and do as they please."

Lynne was silent. Calhoun, looking down at her, noticed and approved the soft dark sweep of the long lashes against the clear whiteness of her skin. It would be awfully easy to fall in love with her! Though, of course, he didn't intend to do anything so foolish.

Nevertheless, there was a loverlike inflection in his voice as he said gently; "Don't bother your little head about your cousin. She's perfectly able to take care of herself. Whoever gets into a scrape, you can be sure she won't. She's the kind that slides from under."



He ventured a light, consolatory pressure of her hand.

Lynneth told herself he meant well, and was very kind. But she didn't care to discuss the matter with him. She wasn't grateful for his attempted reassurance; she only felt that she ought to feel grateful. She had no impulse to confide in him. She regretted giving him even so much confidence as her impulsive allusion to Aunt Honoria.

"I suppose I'm making a mountain out of a mole-hill!" Her reply was carefully careless. "I haven't been in New York long enough to get into the ways——"

"No, thank heaven!" he fervently interrupted. "That's part of your charm! You're so beautifully unlike——"

At this point Ashby Lawrence cut in on him, to Lynneth's relief and somewhat, when he came to think it over, to his own satisfaction. The half-said is so often the more effective!—as well as the more easily ignored, should ignoring prove desirable. He thought of the incident again, and with a smile of gratification, as the footman helped him on with his overcoat. He meant to finish the evening at a supper club with Miss Gwendolyn Fotheringay of the Frivolity Frolics.

When Valerie reappeared, some time during the small hours of the morning, Lynneth gave her Lily's message, and added tentatively: "Suzanne Romeyne said you'd gone to the Paris Roof."

"Clever girl!" yawned Valerie.

"Isn't that rather——"

"Oh, shut up, Linnie! I shan't love you any more if you begin to scold me. Why, damn it all, child, I know more about New York and New York men in a minute than you'll ever learn if you live to be a thousand! See here, you're not going to turn tattle-tale, are you?"

"Of course not!" Lynneth exclaimed indignantly.

"It's all right, then. You just shut those big eyes of

yours up tight, and you won't see anything you shouldn't."

But Lynneth's perceptions were too acute to be easily blinded. And as time went on she became more and more conscious that not only in the larger social world wherein she felt herself an alien, but also in the tiny one of the household to which she at least temporarily belonged, much was happening she did not clearly see, nor understand.

Steadily there grew within her a new and uncomfortable conviction that between the austere walls of what the newspapers sometimes described as "the Hetherington mansion" an all but invisible drama was being enacted. Instinct told her that upon a stage of which she had as yet caught scarcely a glimpse Valerie, Lisa and Phil Armytage were playing rôles widely different from those assigned them by their avowed and accredited situation. And this consciousness of hidden drama possessed her more and more as the weeks went by. What she feared, what she expected, she did not know; but only that her nerves tingled, responding to the vibrations of the unseen action, that amid the confused and indistinct murmurings which reached her from behind the still unlifted curtain there came an infrequent word or sound laden with menace, foreshadowing possible tragedy.

Out of all this bewilderment and confusion slowly emerged two or three discernible points, islets in a morass of bewilderment and conjecture. Lisa's silent antagonism, both towards Valerie and towards Lynneth herself, had greatly increased. Moreover, there was some—could it be called understanding? Scarcely; the word was too definite in its meaning. Not precisely that, then; but something there certainly was between Valerie and the man who was going to marry her half-sister. A shared joke, perhaps; or so it might seem from their smiling glances, so stealthy and so swift. Yet if a joke,



one which had a hint of treachery, more than a hint of challenge. . . .

Of this challenge Lisa, she instinctively knew, was entirely aware. Yet she remained silent, passive, seemingly acquiescent. Only into her greedy eyes there came at times a gleam which suggested that her passivity, her acquiescence, were those of a cat, waiting the moment to pounce.

And the cat had claws of sharpest steel.

## CHAPTER FIFTH

THE preparations for the coming wedding progressed with the smoothness of well-oiled machinery. There was a brief period of intense anxiety when it seemed possible that the hand-wrought lingerie, all cobwebby linen and thread lace and fairy-like embroidery, might not arrive from Paris in time, but the fear happily proved groundless. The final revision of the lists of guests, separating those who simply must be asked to the reception from the inferior beings entitled only to a card to the church, though nerve-racking enough, was less trying than the subsequent assigning of seats in that extremely fashionable edifice, with all the endless complications introduced by divorces, second marriages and family feuds. No diplomat ever struggled with international difficulties more earnestly or more conscientiously than did Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington with the problems arising from the fact that human nature remains human nature, even in the very best society.

Lynneth made herself as useful as her lack of familiarity with such functions would permit, while Mr. Hetherington observed with silent bitterness that her services did not, after all, cause his wife to dispense with those of a highly trained, highly paid secretary. Mrs. Hetherington, dutifully absorbed though she was in the approaching wedding, was also aware of a slight disappointment whenever she thought of Lynneth. No use denying it, the child wasn't a success! But she was a sweet-tempered, unobtrusive little thing, and a convenient companion for Valerie. She might be old-fashioned, but in her opinion it didn't look well for a girl to be seen running about alone, even in the daytime. Other

mothers might do as they pleased, but she intended to look after *her* daughter! In the evenings, if she did not herself act as chaperone, the discreet Parkins always went with the girls in the motor. That was the way she had been brought up, and she thanked heaven that she and her husband were conservative people who kept to the good old customs!

On the whole, she wasn't sorry they had been so generous to Paul Frear's daughter. And they had been extremely generous. Why, they needn't have done anything for her! Most people wouldn't in these days when family ties were so little regarded! As soon as Lisa was safely settled, she'd make it her business to learn something about this young Danvers Calhoun. He seemed to be paying Lynneth a good deal of attention, but then one couldn't tell—good gracious, she'd put Mrs. Vance in the pew with her brother-in-law, and they hadn't been on speaking terms for years!

Lynneth felt the subtle change in her Aunt Honoria's attitude. She was beginning to puzzle a good deal, and to worry more than a little about her plans of future independence. She couldn't and wouldn't go on this way! But whenever she spoke of trying to find "something to do" she was met by a placid; "Oh, my dear, wait until after the wedding! I can't think about anything else just now. And I don't know what I'd do if you weren't here to help me. Would you mind listing the presents that came this morning? I'm so afraid of having Lisa thank people for the wrong things! They always think it's done on purpose."

Lynneth listed the presents.

Her task finished, she decided on a walk. Aunt Honoria wouldn't want her again this afternoon, and Valerie was at a bridge party. She wondered whether she might make another attempt to see Joan Hilary? Twice she had gone to the house, once a private dwelling, now divided into apartments of "two rooms and



bath," between Third Avenue and Gramercy Park, and twice there had been no response to her ring. Perhaps she'd better wait until she heard from Miss Hilary, and merely go for a walk.

The winter day was of a rare, gem-like brightness. Not a breath of wind stirred the frosty air, which seemed to glitter in the light of the low February sun. The cold urged pedestrians to an unwonted briskness. Cart-wheels grated on the roadways with the sharp, brittle sound heard only when the temperature is well below freezing. Whipped by the stinging cold, the young blood mounted into Lynne's cheeks until they glowed; her eyes were starry beneath the candid brow. Fastening the brown fur high about her throat and cuddling her small hands cosily within the shelter of her big muff, she strode swiftly forward, youth and the joyous expectancy of youth in her every glance and movement. Turning into Fifth Avenue, she flung a momentary, backward look to where the Washington Arch rose above the glistening snow, fresh-fallen that very morning. The trees were pencilled in sharply slender black lines against the hard keen blue of the cloudless winter sky. On the snow-covered pathways children played, children of the very rich and of the very poor, their shrill cries rising high and thin to meet and blend in the clear bright air. A sudden longing for the childish delights she had never known pierced Lynne. Watching the little things scamper back and forth, her eyes softened; she smiled involuntarily; there was a pleasant warmth at her heart. Then with a quick little upward movement of the head she went her way along the Avenue.

She was a rapid walker. Soon she had passed the deserted, snow-bound benches of Union Square, where the bare-headed statue of Lafayette looked miserably chilly, and reached the corner of Twenty-third Street. Avoiding the little triangle on which stands the Worth Monument whose reason for being is a profound and

completely uninteresting mystery to most of the thousands who see it every day, she crossed over to Madison Square. There was something pleasantly familiar in the crunching of the hard-trodden snow beneath her feet, and she glanced anxiously up at the big clock on the Metropolitan Tower, hoping it might still be early enough for her to take a turn about the Square and then go on as far as Thirty-fourth Street before she started homewards.

It was not until she lowered her eyes that she saw Joan Hilary coming towards her across the snow, the almost insolently careless carriage of her tall, rather lanky figure as noticeable here in the open air as it had been in Mrs. Hetherington's drawing-room. She was one of those peculiar persons who never seem to become a part of their background, but always remain, if not exactly alien, at least somewhat detached.

Catching sight of Lynneth, she quickened her already swift pace and came rapidly towards her, holding out a long, capable hand encased in a fleece-lined glove. She never carried a muff, declaring it "an infernal nuisance."

"This is a jolly bit of luck!" she exclaimed cordially. "I've tried half a dozen times to get hold of you for tea, but the confounded wire was always busy—or Central said it was! Come on home with me now."

For all her tendency towards hero-worship, Lynneth had developed a certain amount of skepticism during the months spent in Washington Square, and such a speech as this she would usually have discounted by ninety, if not a hundred per cent. But in Joan's strong face and nervous, husky voice there was something which convinced you that if she said she had made half a dozen attempts to get you on the telephone, the probability was that she had tried a full six times, or perhaps eight.

Lynneth looked again at the clock. She wasn't sure she could go with Joan and be back before six, but—oh well, she'd risk it. Lots of girls went around alone



after nightfall, and without being in their own cars either!

All Mrs. Hetherington's dictates, dictates her own daughter constantly and consistently evaded, Lynneth had obeyed, simply because Aunt Honoria had been kind to her. Now for the first time she felt resentful of the numerous "Thou shalt nots," whose origin lay in out-worn conventions, and not in reason. But if she rebelled, she would rebel frankly and openly—submit, or defy.

"I'd love to come!" she exclaimed enthusiastically, adding; "I've tried to see you a couple of times, but you were always out."

"Been doing my noblest to convince the workmen who are fitting up the shop for us that it wouldn't do them any permanent injury to interrupt their conversation now and then, and get something done. If I couldn't accomplish more in an hour than they do in a day, I'd go out and hang myself with the utmost rapidity!"

"Would you mind telling me something about the shop? I'm tremendously interested! You see, when I first came to New York I expected to go to work very soon, and earn my own living. But Aunt Honoria wanted me to stay on and help her with Lisa's wedding, and so—and so——"

"And so you subsided comfortably into the Hetherington cotton-wool? Don't you find it rather oppressive sometimes? Should think you'd stifle!"

This might not be particularly polite, but Lynneth was too interested to be critical.

"I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean?"

Joan answered the question with another. "How much of New York have you really seen since you got here?"

Lynneth hesitated. "Oh, a good deal of it!"

"Through the windows of a limousine! Wager anything you like that all you know is one side of Washing-

ton Square—and only a part of that!—a bit of Murray Hill, Park Avenue and Fifth, with a few of the side-streets between them. Aren't those the only places—well, within bounds?"

"Ye-es. I suppose so. All the people we go to do seem to live—— But isn't that New York? At least, the New York of the native-born?"

"Bless you, no, child, of course it isn't!" Then in parentheses; ("Here we are. Wait a minute till I open the door. Ever hear such creaky stairs? Take off your things and sit down by the radiator while I start the kettle.") Oh, it's a part of it, of course. But New York, English-speaking New York, isn't one city. One city! It's a couple of dozen at least, and they're all as different as different can be. Every one sees and recognizes the foreign colonies; I'm not talking about them, but about—well, I was born and brought up in the Hetheringtons' New York. Got tired of it, and had a go at Greenwich Village. Hadn't much use for that either. Now I'm living in another, not so definitely located on the map, but just as distinct."

"And that is——?"

"The New York of the professional women. Not the "arty" crowd that dabbles and messes, but the genuine workers who don't waste any time on attitudinizing. They live—oh, they live all over the place, from the Battery to the Bronx, but they've got a New York of their own, just the same."

She had flung gloves and coat aside while she talked, and pulling off her hat, thrown it towards a chair. Hitting the chair, it rolled off and fell to the floor. Her straight brown hair, turned up and fastened close about her head, looked at first glance as if it had been bobbed. Her high cheek bones, irregular, aggressive nose, generously cut mouth and uncompromising chin gave her the look of a portrait-study only roughly blocked in. It was

a strong face, full of character, redeemed from plainness by a camelia-like complexion and changeful, yellow-flecked hazel eyes.

"What about the people who live in all those big apartment houses on Riverside Drive?" Lynneth asked curiously, remembering Aunt Honoria's sweeping classification, and her own conjectures.

Joan hitched her thin shoulders. "You'll find a few of the professionals over there, but not many. Too expensive. Generally speaking, it's the happy hunting ground of the transplanted. Most of them come from towns and smaller cities. They make money; they crowd the shops and theatres, and they'll cheerfully pay any price to go where they think they'll see what they call fashionable society. And their chances of belonging to the New York they want to be a part of are about as good as if they lived in Borneo. What do you think," she added abruptly, "what do you think of the people you see at those Friday afternoons Mrs. Hetherington clings to so pertinaciously?"

The younger girl stared thoughtfully into her tea-cup. It was of the finest Minton; the tea fragrant Chinese. As in a procession, she saw those who passed through Mrs. Hetherington's drawing-room on Friday afternoons. Their names, many of them, might have been found in any history of old New York. They came from various parts of the city, some splendidly dressed, others pathetic in their shabbiness, all alike convinced of their superiority to ordinary mortals. And though some were scarcely middle-aged, if more were old, the greater number conveyed a curious impression, an impression not at all a matter of years, of belonging to the dead past rather than to the living present. Something lay upon them like a blight. A something not of evil, but of a withering at the root. Lynneth observed the effect; the cause she could not divine. Only one with far more knowledge of the world could have seen in it the inevitable fate of any



aristocracy which tries to enjoy its privileges while neglecting its responsibilities, priding itself on the deeds of its forefathers without an effort to emulate them, and lauding their fight for freedom while yielding supinely to the rule of the ward-heeler and the Tammany boss.

She raised her eyes, and her enquiring gaze met Joan's frankly.

"They don't seem very—very young at heart," she said slowly, trying to put her impressions into words, and finding it difficult.

Joan spoke bitingly; "They represent the class that has shirked for more than one generation. Those who were born with power and were too lazy to use it; who should have led, and found it less trouble to follow."

Lynneth's dark brows drew together; she was trying to express thoughts familiarity had not yet moulded into phrases. "But if new people didn't come up now and then, if they didn't have a chance to be leaders when the gift for leadership's in them——?"

"Oh, an aristocracy that keeps its powers alive by using them needn't fear competition! It has all the chances on its side. But—*noblesse oblige*! If it doesn't——" she dropped the sentence.

"To be born with chances and responsibilities and sneak away from them! That's a pretty mean sort of cowardice, isn't it? The shirkers——"

"Belong in limbo, of course. Salvation's for those willing to fight for it. Have another cup?"

"Yes, please."

That reply was mechanical. Lynneth's eager mind worked rapidly, its changes of thought reflected in the expressive face whose mobility was its greatest charm. Joan's incisive speech had linked things up for her, giving a wide significance to what had seemed of small importance, suggesting large issues, showing past and present as parts of each other, and of a wide-flung whole.

"Sorry Madge Ayres didn't come in," Joan remarked



irrelevantly. She had a way of suddenly dismissing one subject and picking up another with no discernible relation to the first. "I hoped she would. Like you to meet her."

"Who is she?"

"My partner. Fascinating little Southern woman who looks as if she couldn't do a thing, and can do almost anything. She's scrapped her husband, and now she's here in New York on her own."

"Divorced? How dreadful!"

"Shocked?"

Lynneth's eyebrows went up. "Why, isn't it dreadful to see people fail? And what's divorce, after all, but an admission of failure?"

"Um-m. Sometimes! Sometimes only of a need for readjustment. Expect Madge'll try again one of these days. Why shouldn't she?" Joan was doing a little investigating.

"It does seem silly to—well, to be like the men,

'Who proudly clung

To their first fault and withered in their pride,'

doesn't it?" Lynneth seldom quoted poetry, but she felt amazingly at ease with Joan. "It's different if there hasn't been any mistake. My mother died when I was a wee bit of a girl, and I don't think my father ever looked or even wanted to look at another woman."

Again Joan hitched her shoulders. "That kind of fidelity's rather more ethereal than practical, isn't it? We've got to live in this very matter of fact world—unfortunately! I've an idea you might like Madge. Tea sweet enough?"

## CHAPTER SIXTH

LYNNETH wished she could see Joan often. There were so many things she'd like to talk over with that detached and frequently brusque person! Yet after all, there was only one question she could put into definite form; what was she to do in the future? Dependence, unpalatable almost from the first, was becoming more distasteful every day.

She had never intended more than a visit which should prepare her for going to work. She found herself surrounded by walls, padded until they were soft as down pillows, and as resilient. Every suggestion she made was instantly vetoed. When a magazine article gave her the idea of taking a course in a business college, Mrs. Hetherington was as shocked as if she had proposed studying to become an expert pickpocket.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed. "You couldn't possibly. It's quite out of the question. Don't give it another thought."

"But why not? Other girls——"

"You're not 'other girls,' my dear. You're Lynneth Frear, my niece. What might be perfectly proper for Miss Brown of Harlem, wouldn't do for you at all. We won't say any more about it. Will you ring for Wilbur, please?"

The butler's entrance ended the discussion. Symbolically, at least, the butler's entrance always did end such discussions.

Mrs. Hetherington had the advantage of age, and of her position as hostess. Insistence without rudeness was difficult, especially as Lynneth had no cherished plan on which to insist. Day after day she studied the "Help

Wanted" columns in the newspapers; but no one seemed to need the services of a young woman who read Greek and was intimately acquainted with the English classics. Plus a working knowledge of French and typewriting, these were her only qualifications.

But plan or no plan, she could do nothing until after the wedding. Then she would force the issue, despite all Mrs. Hetherington's feather-pillow resistance. And all the while her attention was being distracted from her own affairs by the sense of hidden drama, the consciousness that Lisa was waiting, cat-like, waiting—for what?

What was she looking for? What did the dull flame mean which so often smouldered in those pale eyes? There was scarcely a spoken word, scarcely an open action to be seized upon as a clue, a significant nucleus of crystallization. Yet Lynneth knew that Valerie was gayly, self-confidently defiant, while Lisa—waited.

Since her coming to Washington Square, circumstances had constrained Lynneth to passivity. Now, suddenly, that happened which demanded swift and decided action.

It began with an argument, not at all unusual, between Valerie and her mother, as to which of two invitations should be accepted.

"I don't want to go to the Vances'," Valerie declared sullenly. "I don't want to go to the Vances', and I do want to go to the carnival dance at the Demarests'. They'll have a jolly crowd, and the Vances' parties are always so stodgy!"

"We won't say any more about it, my dear," replied Mrs. Hetherington, using a favourite formula. "Neither your father nor I want you to have anything to do with Mrs. Demarest. She's not a person we care to have our daughter associate with. Lynneth dear, please write acceptances for yourself and Valerie to Mrs. Vance, and regrets to Mrs. Demarest. Lisa is going to an after-theatre supper at Mary Taylor's."



Valerie looked sulky, but she said no more, and Lyn-neth did not think again of the disagreement. She did not particularly care for Mrs. Demarest, whose manners were as artificial as her complexion, and whose reputation, like her lips, was of a much too brilliant scarlet. But there were a number of things in this new life for which she did not particularly care, as well as many she thoroughly relished.

The Vances' dinner-dance was exactly like the majority of dinner-dances. Danvers Calhoun took her in, and ostentatiously devoted himself to her. People had begun to assign them to each other and he had, as he very well knew, received more than one desirable invitation simply because of that assignment.

Lynneth herself had never thought his admiration serious, but she enjoyed it, as every normal girl enjoys the admiration of any man she does not positively dislike; at least, until he begins to prefer claims. This danger point Calhoun was fast approaching.

"You haven't even looked at me for ever so long!" he exclaimed reproachfully as she turned back to him after talking a few minutes with Freddy Saunders, who was on her other side. Lily Gresham, at Calhoun's own left, was a shrewd young person with no intention of wasting valuable time, and he had sat neglected and annoyed. "What did you find so interesting about that dub?"

"I forgot to make any notes," she replied, demurely mischievous.

"Why won't you tell me what you were talking about?"

"Why should I?"

"Because you know how much I care about everything you say and do! Seems to me we're good enough—friends for me to——"

"Goodness! All this seriousness because I turned my back on you for five minutes!"

"Oh, very well! Of course, if you don't care how I feel——"



"Don't be absurd!" she interrupted hastily. "I don't want to quarrel with you."

"But you don't mind making me miserable!"

She flushed a little. His tone was making her ask herself whether he could really be in earnest? The idea was flattering and not unpleasant, but she wanted time, and she spoke hurriedly and at random; "Don't you think we've talked nonsense long enough? Who's the man sitting next to Marjorie Vance?—the one in uniform Mr. Lawrence is just speaking to?"

Calhoun had not sufficient subtlety to understand the reason for that hasty question. He felt snubbed; irritated to an extent that surprised him. His reply was ungracious; "Fellow named Tressel—Geoffrey Tressel. Mrs. Vance is one of those hysterical women who think they show their patriotism by making a fuss about every putty-headed idiot who got over to the other side and managed to come back with a decoration."

Lynneth would have been more than human had she resisted the temptation to tease him; she didn't even try.

"He doesn't look as if there were anything the matter with him," she remarked critically, her pretty head cocked a little to one side. "Of course you may be right about his being a mental defective, but he certainly doesn't look it!"

"I didn't say he was a mental defective! I only——"

"Who's defective?" put in Freddy Saunders, from Lynneth's other side.

"The man Mr. Lawrence is talking to. Mr. Calhoun says——"

"Who? Tressel? Oh rot! Nothing of the sort. He did get knocked around a good bit during the war—he's an aviator and he's got a whole car-load of medals—but they fixed him up as good as new. I knew him over there." Freddy was enjoying the sound of his own voice, and Calhoun's annoyance. "He hasn't been in New York

much, and he's only here for a night now. Off to the Coast tomorrow."

Which piece of information did not sadden Calhoun.

Perhaps the mysterious sixth sense with which we are all endowed made Geoffrey Tressel aware that they were talking about him. He glanced in their direction. And across the dim spaces of the room, where the small, candle-lit, flower-strewn tables made little oases of light, his eyes met those of Lynneth Frear.

Something seemed to flash between them; a faint, inexplicable, curiously pleasant shock of recognition. "Why, I know him!" Lynneth thought. During the instant his eyes held hers this feeling of recognition became so strong that next moment she turned to Saunders, asking; "Hasn't Mr. Tressel been in New York this winter? I'm sure I've met him somewhere! And his name's familiar too."

"Guess you've heard Lawrence speak of him. He hasn't been near New York for ever so long. He's been down South on government business of some sort or other."

Calhoun scowled. "Humph! Don't these politicians make you tired? Giving a boy like that all sorts of chances just because his uncle was an ambassador!"

"You're 'way off!" Freddy Saunders' reply was decidedly snappish. "You're 'way off! Tressel knows more about aeronautics in a minute than most of us could learn in a hundred years. Besides, old Winthrop Tressel threw him over ages ago." He speared an ice with his fork, adding aggressively; "Tressel's a bully good scout. I knew him over there."

That really wasn't nice of Freddy. It was not Calhoun's fault that he had never gone beyond the camp on Long Island. But he was silenced, and Lynneth, attributing to him a regret he did not feel, began to talk of something else.

But in spite of Freddy's denials, the feeling of recognition, the sense that she had met and knew this Geoffrey Tressel, persisted so strongly that later in the evening, when Ashby Lawrence introduced him to her and he asked for a dance, almost the first thing she said was: "Have you ever been in New England, Major Tressel?"

He shook his dark head, watching her face with quick, keen eyes, grey-blue, deep-set, and very clear. "Only on the Maine coast, and in Boston."

"And you haven't been in New York at all this winter?"

"Not for six or seven years—just after I left college. I went abroad then, and though I meant to come back, the war happened along, and, of course, I couldn't. I hope to stay put in America now—for a while, anyway. I've promised to spend the summer with some friends of mine, the Thornes, who live up in the northern part of the state. Do you know that country?"

"No, not at all. It's queer—perhaps you've a double somewhere? I'm sure I've seen you before."

He manœuvred his way skilfully through a tangle of couples; but he was an excellent dancer, and she felt sure that it was not the difficulties of the crowded floor which made him pause.

"It is queer," he responded presently, "because, do you know, I had the same feeling about you? I asked Lawrence who you were, and whether—— Oh, thunder!"

The muttered exclamation was music to Lynneth. She too resented Calhoun's cutting in and carrying her off with an air of possessive triumph.

She had an unusually good time that evening. She danced again with Tressel, and was chatting gayly to Ashby Lawrence, whose quizzical smile softened a little as he answered her when, just before midnight, Valerie touched her arm.

"Listen, Linnie!" she said hurriedly, drawing her a little aside. "I'm going over to the Demarests'. Phil—



I mean, I've got a date there. You can stop for me with the car."

"But, Valerie, your mother——"

"Oh, rot! She and father have gone to the opera. They'll be tucked up in their little beds long before we get home. What you don't know doesn't hurt you, and she'll never know a thing about this, unless"—the innocent, madonna-like eyes were hard now, and suspicious—"unless you give me away."

"You know I won't do that!"

Valerie's tone and manner changed on the instant. "'Course I do! You're a dear little soul, Linnie, and I love you lots. Now trot along and make eyes at Danvers Calhoun while I go where there's something doing. Don't forget to pick me up! 'By!"

And Valerie, radiantly lovely in the clinging, flame-coloured chiffon which emphasized the sea-foam whiteness of her throat and shoulders, slipped out of sight among the crowd.

Linneth was troubled. It wasn't, of course, the first time such a thing had happened, but it was the very first time Valerie had gone to a specifically prohibited place—at least, so far as Linneth knew. She had never followed her popular cousin's example, but she had heard many rumours of what went on at these "awfully jolly" parties. She shrugged her pretty shoulders as she turned back to her partner. Valerie would do as she pleased; she *always* did as she pleased!

But for once she found herself obliged to interfere.

Less than half an hour had gone by when a footman came to her; "You're wanted on the telephone, ma'am."

A chilly little breath of foreboding seemed to blow over her as she took up the receiver. Mr. Hetherington's voice came over the wire.

"Hello!—Oh, that you, Linneth? I told them to get either you or Valerie. I wanted to let you know that your aunt and I will stop for you and bring you home.



Johnson was run into by another car on the way back to the garage, and the brougham can't be used."

"Was Johnson hurt?"

"Johnson——? Oh, some scratches, I believe. But I don't want you to come home in a taxi tonight. There's to be a big meeting, Bolshevik or I. W. W. or something of the kind, down in Union Square, and they're predicting all sorts of trouble."

Lynneth's thoughts raced. "You're 'phoning from the Metropolitan?"

"Yes; we're going on to the Delavans' for supper. We'll leave there at twenty minutes past one, and stop for you at half-past. Tell Valerie to be ready; her mother doesn't like to be kept waiting. Good-by!"

Lynneth hung up the receiver and seized the telephone book. She must warn Valerie.

"Columbus, 26937.—Yes, please.—What did you say?—The line's out of order?—Oh, can't you get a message through? It's important.—You can't?—You're sure?—Very well. Good-by!"

What was she to do? What in the world *could* she do? Mr. Hetherington would be furious! He had often boasted that no matter what other people's daughters might be, his were obedient! There'd be an awful row! He particularly objected to Mrs. Demarest—and that Valerie should deceive him and her mother would hurt them both——

She thought only of the trouble this prank of Valerie's might cause, not of any effect it would perhaps have upon herself. Somehow, she must warn Valerie.

She must go to her; there wasn't any other way. Go to her, and bring her back before her father came. Upstairs for her coat; then a taxi——

"Is anything the matter?" Geoffrey Tressel was beside her, looking down at her small, tense face. "Can't I do something?"

The dancing had begun again. They were alone in the

tapestry-hung foyer, just outside the ballroom, at the foot of the great stairway.

She paused, glanced at him—and came instantly to a decision. “Will you get me a taxi, please? And—don’t let any one know.”

“I’ll have one here in two seconds. Anything else?”

Not by so much as the movement of an eyelid did he ask an explanation. Obscurely, irresistibly impelled, she offered one.

“My cousin, Valerie Hetherington, has gone to a party at the Demarests’. I’ve got to—to bring her back here. Her father’s coming, and he—— The line’s out of order; I can’t telephone.”

“Get your coat and come along.” He had never heard of the Demarests, but he gauged the situation with a good deal of accuracy. “You have the address?”

“Yes; No. — Central Park West.”

“All right. I’ll be here. You’ll let me go with you, won’t you? It’s beastly dark and lonely crossing the Park, and some of these taxi drivers are a pretty tough lot.”

Lynneth looked up at him—the top of her head reached only a little way above his shoulder. Their eyes met. She gave a quick little nod. “I won’t be a minute!”

She ran upstairs to the dressing-room, demanded her white fur coat from the interested French maid, and flinging it about her shoulders, was back in little more than the stipulated minute. Quick as she was, Tressel was quicker.

“What time is it?” she asked as the taxi door slammed upon them.

He consulted his watch. “Five minutes to one.”

She bit her lip. Thirty minutes; she could count on thirty minutes’ grace, then; no more. Thirty minutes in which to reach the Demarests’, find Valerie, explain what had happened, and get her back to the Vances’ before her father and mother arrived! But what if she

had left the Demarests' for some cabaret? Thirty minutes!

For Valerie's sake, for her mother's sake—how it would hurt Aunt Honoria to find out that Valerie had been cheating her! She mightn't understand; of course it was just thoughtlessness and high spirits on Valerie's part, but she mightn't understand. And Mr. Hetherington——! There'd be a quarrel, the worst sort of a quarrel——

Oh, why, why didn't the man drive faster? Thirty minutes!

She sat on the very edge of the seat, her slim little hands tightly clasped together. Thirty minutes! But it wasn't thirty minutes now! It seemed as if they had been hours on the way—hours!

Thank goodness, they were turning out of the Park! They must be nearly there. Here they were, at last!

It was a big, duplex apartment house, of the expensive "studio" type inhabited more by faddists than by artists. Many of the windows were dark, but the fifth floor was brilliantly lighted. Tressel glanced up, caught sight of several silhouettes, and suppressed an exclamation. There was a grim look about his mouth as he followed Lynneth into the elevator.

In the palm-bedecked foyer of the Demarests' apartment, coats and wraps of every sort and colour were heaped high. Lynneth flung hers among the rest. The studio, where they were dancing, was on the floor above. A white-painted, twisting stairway wound up to it.

"Will you wait here for me?" she asked. She wanted to spare Valerie.

"I'll be ready when you want me." His thoughts gave the phrase a double meaning.

She nodded her thanks, and he saw that her eyelids were twitching with nervousness. But she did not hesitate. She turned, and went swiftly up the stairs, a wraith-like little figure in her fluffy, frivolous dancing



dress of orchid-tinted tulle, with a tiny silver wreath banding the shadowy masses of her dark hair.

There was a landing midway up the twisting staircase, and there for a breath of time she paused, glancing down at Tressel as if to see him gave her courage. . . .

Only a breath of time. But he never forgot the picture she made poised there alone, so small and slight and fragile-looking, her wistful mouth and deep grey eyes mutely grateful for the help her pride would have forbidden her to ask in any need of her own, going straight and unfaltering to a dreaded ordeal.

From the room above came the barbaric discords of a jazz band, ear-piercing, nerve-thrilling, its throb and crash calling imperiously to the brute that lurks deep within even the most civilized. Tressel had heard that call many a time, but now it stirred him only to a profound, unreasoning anger. The Congo music, the shrieks of laughter, laughter which was a fitting accompaniment to the negroid cries, the beat of tom-toms—and that slender girl with the innocently questing eyes, going to confront all they might imply!

He paused a moment, unconsciously drawing up his six feet two of bone and muscle. He remembered those glimpsed silhouettes.

And he had turned to the stairs before he heard her sharp cry of anger.

Two at a time, he sprang up them. They led directly into the immense room, where rose-wreathed mirrors set in silken-hung walls reflected that which jungle music and champagne cocktails had helped to produce.

A hilarious crowd had collected in one corner. Men and girls stood on tip-toe, pushing and shoving, dishevelled, squealing with hysterical laughter as they struggled to see over one another's shoulders.

Only golden-haired Valerie, standing on the edge of the group with Phil Armytage's arm about her, made no effort to get nearer, but cried on a high note, more



of amusement than of protest: "Oh, let her alone, Sam! She's just a silly kid. Let her alone!"

Tressel could see over the heads of the others. He did not stop to argue. Catapulting straight into the midst of the half-hysterical, half-drunken crowd, flinging one and another aside, he reached the man whose clasp held Lynneth, wrenched his arms away, and struck him in the face. . . .

He went sprawling. The crowd gaped its amazement—amazement which in an instant would turn to anger.

Others came running. The crowd had grown. It swayed about them, bewildered, intimidated for the moment.

Tressel turned: "Let me pass!"

Instinctively obeying that authoritative voice, the mob fell back. One arm shielding the girl, Tressel cleared a path through the few who might have resisted, sweeping them out of his way.

Only one man, more courageous or more drunk than the rest, tried to interfere, crying thickly: "You shan't! Damn you, you shan't——"

He never finished the sentence. Tressel's fist caught him on the point of the jaw. . . .

And still the savage music beat on, thump and crash and clang, clang and crash and thump! thump! thump!

"Any one else object?" Tressel demanded.

Nobody answered. They were almost at the door. But the odds against them were more than fifty to one, and a mob is a mob, no matter how much money it may represent. Should the dazed, befuddled crowd turn ugly there might, he thought grimly, be the devil to pay!

He hurried the girl out of the room and down the stair, and pausing only to catch up her white fur coat, reached the elevator; the street; the waiting taxi.

White and shaken, Lynneth lay back in one corner. In the other, Tressel sat, thinking with intense satisfaction of the impact of his fist on the fellow's grinning

mouth. He wouldn't grin with any comfort for a good while, that was certain! One of his knuckles was slightly cut, and he smiled as he wiped off the blood with his handkerchief.

They were among the shadows of Central Park when Lynne put her hands to her disordered hair. In a low voice she did her best to keep steady; "I can't thank you—enough!" she said. "If you hadn't come——"

That involuntary shudder of hers!

Out of the darkness Tressel's voice came, deep with understanding. "Don't thank me. I'm glad I was there."

Her hands clenched. "I hope you hurt him!"

"I hope I did! I don't think he enjoyed it. I'd have liked to give him the thrashing of his life—cur!"

Yielding to impulse; "Valerie was there," she said abruptly. "She wouldn't——"

"She wouldn't come?" he encouraged.

"No. She said to tell her father she'd gone off with Lily Gresham. Lily was there, but—I hate lies!"

"Then why——?"

"I promised. I promised Valerie I wouldn't give her away. And she's always been so sweet to me; until tonight. But tonight she—she laughed when that horrible man——. They all laughed. They said I was a prude, and must pay forfeit for coming there where prudes weren't admitted, and it would do me good to be—to be——"

Her cheeks were burning. She could not finish, and very soon she was to wonder at the impulse which had carried her so far. She had known this man only a very few hours, yet it seemed perfectly natural to tell him—almost anything!

"Don't!" he exclaimed sharply. "To think of you in that crowd, and with that filthy brute——! You! It makes me savage!"

She thrilled to her finger-tips. The same delicious tin-

gling had swept through her once before, when his protecting arm went about her. . . .

As the taxi drew up before the Vances' house she turned to him, tried to speak, choked over the words, and silently offered him her hand.

He took and held it firmly. The light of a street lamp shone full upon her face, flushed, with wide eyes and sweet, tremulous lips. He looked at them. And she knew he wanted to kiss her, and knew too that in spite of herself she would welcome his kiss. . . .

Yet she was glad that he only pressed her fingers an instant, released them, and stooped to open the taxi door.

They had been gone exactly twenty-nine minutes.

## CHAPTER SEVENTH

"I SUPPOSE you're in a blue rage," remarked Valerie regretfully. "But really, Linnie dear, it was all your own fault! When you're in Rome, etcetera and so forth, you know."

She had just returned from a house-party up the Hudson, and this was the first time she had seen Linneth alone since the latter's unexpected appearance at the Demarests'.

"Yes. In future, I'll keep away from—Rome. You can manage your little excursions there for yourself."

"Oh, come now, Linnie, be a sport!"

"Thank you, I'd rather not. Not if being a sport means acting like a—like a third-rate courtesan."

"Good gracious, what dreadful ideas you do have!"

"Well, I won't be—pawed over by any man who happens to feel like pawing me, and that's all there is to it. What you do is your own affair. If you enjoy having Phil Armytage——"

"It's only fun!"

"Fun, to have the man who's going to marry your sister behave towards you the way Phil was doing when I came in the other night?"

"Why, yes. We're teasing Lisa almost out of her wits, and she doesn't dare to say a word. She's awfully afraid Phil will chuck her—or force her to chuck him!"

Linneth was silent. Valerie's amusement, Valerie's avowed and deliberate cruelty, sickened her. And sickened her the more, because she had for a time made Valerie her idol.

Exceptionally bad weather was keeping them all indoors that day. The rain, driven by a wicked north-east



wind, lashed at the windows. The backyards on which Lynneth's room looked out were deserted; even the vagrant cats had fled to shelter. Though nearly one o'clock, the purple-black storm clouds hanging low over the city made it too dark to read or sew without artificial light. From the chintz-covered couch on which Valerie had flung herself her fair hair and white skin seemed softly luminous amid the shadows. She had strolled lazily into Lynneth's room, made herself comfortable, and uttered the protest whose idle tone was contradicted by her anxious eyes.

After a long pause:

"Besides," Valerie went on negligently, watching Lynneth closely from beneath her long curling lashes, "besides, Lynnie darling, isn't it a little late in the day for you to start playing the unsuspecting innocent?"

Lynneth, who had been standing looking out at the wind-blown curtains of rain, turned on her swiftly.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"What do I mean?" drawled Valerie. "What do I—! Oh, come now, darling, don't be absurd! You knew perfectly well that Phil and I were meeting in all sorts of places, and you sat there in the car and waited for me like a little lamb."

"I knew?"

"Of course you did! Oh, you pretended to believe my little fairy stories about calls and fittings and things, but you knew perfectly well I was going to tea dances at the hotels and meeting Phil all the time. D'you suppose I'd have looked out for you at parties the way I've been doing if you hadn't done anything for me?"

Since so much of the fat was in the fire, Valerie thought the rest might as well go after it and make a good hot blaze, perhaps reducing her antagonist to cinders. If Lynneth could be made to feel like an accomplice, she'd be a good deal less difficult to handle.

It had been very amusing to carry on a half-hidden flir-

tation with Lisa's fiancé, to have all their friends laughing at Phil's infatuation and pitying Lisa; but it wouldn't be so amusing to have—well, to have a row of any kind. Rows are always a nuisance! And since she had no money of her own, to make her father angry was to risk being rendered excessively uncomfortable. Valerie loathed being uncomfortable. Consequently, "Thou shalt not be found out," was to her the first and greatest commandment.

Lynneth faced her, her back to the window, her face pearl-white in the darkness. For a moment her quick, hard breathing alone broke the stillness of the room. Valerie quailed.

Under stress of excitement and champagne, she might become reckless; she was never courageous. Lynneth's silence frightened her. She wished she could recall what she had said, wished that instead of flaunting her very questionable behaviour she had appealed to Lynneth's affection, Lynneth's generosity. Perhaps it wasn't too late to try! She broke into a laugh.

"Oh, Lynneth darling, don't glare at me like that! I was only joking. Of course I didn't—I wasn't——" She couldn't go on. Her self-assurance was crumbled to pieces by some force—power of anger, power of personality—emanating from the small, still figure.

"If any one, if your own mother had told me you could be so mean and—disgusting, I wouldn't have believed her," Lynneth said slowly. Her quiet voice was clear and cold as ice; ice which hid black waters of disillusionment and pain. "You're so beautiful! How *can* you be so contemptible?"

"Why don't you say right out you hate me because you're jealous of me?" Valerie had seized the first weapon at hand. It was her deepest conviction that all women were and must be jealous of her beauty and charm. "I've known how you felt, all the time!"

"No, I don't hate you," Lynneth replied in the same

frozen tone. "I wish I could hate you! I was—fond of you once, and now—now I haven't enough respect for you left to let me hate you."

This was quite over Valerie's head. That contempt might make hatred impossible, was something she could no more understand than she could understand the hurt of Lynneth's disillusionment. Who is without ideals never suffers from their destruction.

Her mind went directly to practical issues.

"Do you mean you're going to break your promise and give me away?" she asked plaintively.

Lynneth pressed her lips together. She had made excuses for Valerie, had loved and admired her, believed in the often professed fondness for herself, and insisted to her own mind that there "wasn't any harm" in the escapades she had supposed far less frequent than they were, and the truth about which she had never even imagined.

The mean cruelty of the whole affair revolted her. Had Valerie been in love with Phil, in any way or to any degree, sympathy would have been possible. But this calculated deception, calculated garnering of pleasure from another's pain, another's humiliation—and that other her own sister! Here was evil stripped of romance and glamour, cautious, endeavouring not to risk anything. . . .

"No," she replied, quietly, but with a new bitterness permeating her voice. "No, I'm not going to give you away."

"You promise?"

"I promise. And now, if you wouldn't mind letting me have my room to myself?"

Valerie rose with a sweeping, graceful movement of long, lithe limbs. "You've a polite way of turning me out!" she said. The little laugh failed to hide her discomfiture. She had the promise she wanted; so far, she had won. Yet she knew herself dominated by the girl she



had for a time successfully hoodwinked, successfully used to further her own ends.

One other weapon was available. She grasped it, and struck.

"Of course I'll quit if you want me to. I can't argue with a guest—especially when the guest has nowhere else to go!"

While speaking she had gone to the door. With the last words she slipped through, closing it behind her.

Lynneth's grey eyes were black with anger.

An instant she paced the room; then she dropped on to the window-seat whose gay, daffodil-flowered chintz was dim in the uncertain light. Resting her elbows on her knees, she leaned her small, slightly pointed chin upon her hands and sat staring out into the grey dreariness of the rain.

The habit of self-control had quickly reasserted itself. Looking out at the rain, she faced her future, faced it squarely and without shrinking. During these months in Washington Square she had allowed herself to be borne along upon the current of other people's wills. Twice only had she acted decisively, and on her own volition. Once, insignificantly, when she went home with Joan Hilary; once vigorously, when for Valerie's sake she went to the Demarests', and there——

Her cheeks burned at the recollection. Yet not entirely with anger. There was more of happiness than of suffering, and much of perplexity. She was honest enough to be honest even with herself. Geoffrey Tressel's coming, the sense of security his presence had brought her, the thrilling sweetness of that last moment in the taxi—all these she held locked within her memory, taking them out now and then to look at them as one looks at the dear souvenirs of a past which is passed indeed.

Since that evening she had never seen nor heard anything of him. Once or twice she had slipped into the



Public Library and asked for a file of California papers. . . .

Now she put all this resolutely aside. Such vague dreams as had woven themselves about it had no possible bearing on the severely practical subject of her future.

What was that future to be? What would she like it to be?

Easy enough to answer that second question! What she wanted, what she had always wanted as far back as she could remember, was the normal lot; the normal lot at its best; husband, children, a home of her own. But the husband of whom she dreamed was a man of men, the children sweet and sound and strong in mind and body, the home a place of trust and peace, a veritable sanctuary.

With no faintest desire to enter the maelstrom of economic competition, she was being forced into it by necessity. Essentially a homemaker and home-lover, she had no home.

Nor any prospect of one. Only Danvers Calhoun wanted her—perhaps. Perhaps, not even he!

One thing alone was certain. She could not, would not remain in the house on Washington Square.

Until Lisa's wedding, now little more than a week off, was over, she could not go. It wouldn't be fair, at this late day, to disarrange Aunt Honoria's plans. But immediately afterwards they were all to leave for Aitken. She would stay behind, to do—what?

The only thing she could think of was trying to carry out her original idea of becoming secretary to some scholar, doing for him what she had so long done for her father. No use being discouraged because she'd never seen such a position advertised! She might even advertise herself. Perhaps Miss Hilary could tell her where and how——

Lisa's unexpected entrance interrupted her planning. A tiny sniff made her aware that the newcomer had per-

ceived the faint rose fragrance of the perfume especially compounded for Valerie, and knew who had been her most recent visitor.

"Mother's lost her copy of the last list of presents, and thought you might have one," Lisa remarked in that thin, metallic voice of hers. "I want to write some notes."

She spoke with meticulous politeness, but all the while her greedy eyes were darting curiously about the room. They reached the couch on which Valerie had lain, paused there, and flickered away.

"It's in my desk. Wait; I'll get it for you."

For an instant, Lynneth bent to search the drawer, but only for an instant. And as she lifted her head she had an impression the dim light prevented from being a certainty, that Lisa had picked up some small white object, and held it crumpled in her hand.

She took the list with a word of thanks and was gone. There was an odd smile on her pale lips.

Lynneth went back to her place by the window and her interrupted planning. Yes, that would be the best way, to advertise. . . .

And while Lynneth, curled up on the window seat, was thus preparing to take up her fragile lance and challenge that world which has so little respect for weapons such as hers, Valerie, lounging gracefully in one of her mother's easy chairs, was looking over some of the newly arrived presents, and amid her running comment on them inserting, quite dexterously, she thought, a spoke in Lynneth's wheel. She had not been clever enough to avoid blundering that morning, but she was fully clever enough to realize that she had blundered, perhaps seriously.

"I suppose Ashby Lawrence will send the invariable paper-knife. He certainly does know how to save himself trouble! Considering their millions, I do think the Wests might have done better than a pair of pepper pots, don't you? Of course, they don't care much about Lisa, but Mrs. West's such an old friend of yours! Her nephew's

a nice boy; he was awfully decent about dancing with Lynneth the other night, when I asked him to."

"I'm sorry Lynneth isn't more of a success. Did you put Mrs. Vance's card back in the box with the candlesticks?"

"Yes; it's all right. I'm sorry about Linnie too. I've done my best for her, but you know how it is! You just can't keep on ramming an unpopular girl down men's throats. And it's—well, it's making things awfully difficult for me."

Now beautiful Valerie was Mrs. Hetherington's most precious possession. Whatever and whoever interfered with Valerie or with Valerie's pleasure was thenceforward and for that reason utterly condemned.

"I'm not at all sure it was wise to ask her here," the excellent matron remarked meditatively. It was the first time the thought had crossed her mind, but she spoke as if it were one long and carefully considered. "I did it partly because—well, for several reasons. Your father was against it from the first, but you know how good and generous he always is!"

"You're good and generous too. It wasn't your fault. You couldn't tell that Linnie would turn out to be—to be the kind of girl she is, and behave in such an awfully foolish way!"

"Why, darling, what has she been doing?"

"Please, mamma, I'd rather not say. It doesn't seem fair to tell on poor little Linnie. She's not been brought up to the sort of thing that goes on in New York, and I suppose you can't blame her for losing her head. But looking after her is awfully difficult!"

Again the question of Paul Frear's daughter was disturbing Mrs. Hetherington's placidity.

"Of course," she said slowly, "of course I quite understand. But it doesn't seem to me as if we could very well—er—do anything, until after Lisa's wedding." She paused, and added, more impulsively than was her cus-



tom. "What makes it so awkward is that Lynneth wanted to start in at once to earn her own living, and we couldn't have her wandering around looking for work. What would people say?"

Valerie considered. "No, of course that wouldn't have done at all. Awfully clever of her to hold you up that way, wasn't it? But why," she asked suddenly, "why shouldn't she go as companion to Miss De Witt? You know, the place Joan Hilary wouldn't take? I was talking to Kathryn De Witt only last night, and she said the old lady hadn't been able to find anyone to suit her. Lynneth would be—*safe*—there."

As safe, she might have added, as in a prison.

Mrs. Hetherington had compunctions. She was by this time almost as determined to get Lynneth out of the house as Lynneth, had she but known it, was to go. But to send her to the ancient brown-stone mausoleum on Fifth Avenue where Miss De Witt lived, surrounded by pet poodles and her relatives' prayers for her speedy demise, was a method from which she shrank.

"It would be rather a dreary life for a young girl, wouldn't it?" she said deprecatingly.

Valerie shrugged her shoulders. "I don't see how we can help that! We've done all we could to give her a chance, and no one's paid any real attention to her except that Calhoun man. You might give her a hint to try and hurry him up."

But the giving of hints wasn't at all in Mrs. Hetherington's line. Nevertheless, when Lynneth, happening to find her alone, once more suggested that it was time she began to support herself, and put forward her idea of an advertisement, Mrs. Hetherington did go so far as to say; "Well, my dear, we don't want to keep you here against your will, you know. Still, just now, with this wedding on hand——"

She paused. Dismay had penetrated her serenity. If Lynneth advertised, people would know about it, and talk!



Talk a good deal more, now that they had all met Lyn-neth, than they would have done a few months ago. She retreated from the thought. Miss De Witt appeared before her in the guise of a rescuer, not of Lyn-neth, but of Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington.

"We'll find you something to do, my dear, so you won't have to advertise. I wouldn't say anything about it yet, if I were you, especially not to—er—to Mr. Calhoun. People do get such wrong impressions! Just call up Veronique, and tell them Lisa and I will come to look at the new embroidery designs for her slippers this afternoon, will you, please?"

She sighed as Lyn-neth went to the telephone. Pity she should be a nuisance to Valerie, when she was such a convenience to Valerie's mother! But since she was a nuisance to Valerie, that ended the matter.

Would it be better to see Miss De Witt personally, or to arrange with her by letter?

## CHAPTER EIGHTH

THESE last few days before the wedding were busy ones for Mrs. Hetherington. Yet she found time for an interview with Miss De Witt. It proved thoroughly satisfactory. Upon learning that Lynneth had acted as her father's secretary, that austere personage even condescended to remark that the girl would probably be able to help her with her correspondence. The number of letters she was obliged to write in the interests of the International Prohibition Society, the Anti-Nicotine Association, the Society For The Investigation of Domestic Morals and various others, took up altogether too much of her time.

Mr. Hetherington gave the project his unqualified approval. Remembering the bills for Lynneth's winter outfit, he sighed with relief at the thought of not being obliged to provide her with a summer one also. In short, everybody was gratified—except Lynneth, still ignorant of the incarceration so kindly arranged for her.

Sensitive to changes in the emotional temperature, she was aware that the atmosphere had become a trifle chilly. This she attributed to the altered relations between herself and Valerie, not realizing that she did so because it was still Valerie who interested her most.

For Valerie was the first person who had ever offered her affection, and though she now knew the offer a lie, she could not at once withdraw what she herself had given. She despised Valerie. But she would have cut her right hand off, willingly and deliberately, could she thereby have restored her shattered idol to its pedestal.

The wedding day came at last, a day all blue and gold, of cloudless skies and sparkling sunshine. The very beau-

tiful and fabulously expensive church on Fifth Avenue and Fifty -th Street, which the Hetheringtons attended on those occasional pleasant Sundays when they had nothing else to do, was crowded to the remotest corner, while outside a throng of the curious clung firmly to every post of vantage, refusing to be dislodged therefrom by the perfunctory; "Move on there, can't yer? Don't yer see yer blockin' up the sidewalk?" of a couple of fat, good-natured policemen.

Within, the soft strains of the fifty-thousand-dollar organ blended with the rustling and whispering of the congregation. Bored, yet anxious ushers hurried up and down the aisles, pausing now and then to consult their typewritten lists; and the lilies and bride's roses with which the church was profusely decorated suggested sarcastic comments to more than one aspiring wit.

But to Lynneth, as following the white-robed choir to the strains of the inevitable Lohengrin march, she came slowly pacing up the aisle beside Kathryn De Witt, it all seemed unreal; a theatrical performance, not a marriage. This ceremony which was to unite Lisa to a man who, as she must and did know, was marrying her only for her money, and whom she was marrying—why *was* she marrying him?—seemed a grisly burlesque, grim and tawdry. How would it end, the drama, divined, yet so long unseen, of which this was certainly not the last act? Where then would that last act be played? On what sort of scene would the final curtain fall?

And there had been a mystifying air of satisfaction about Lisa during these last few days, as if she who had so long bided her time was now prepared—for what?

The joyous march beat an ironic accompaniment to Lynneth's thoughts.

Every one agreed that it was a perfectly beautiful wedding. The more beautiful, several suggested, because the bride kept her point-lace veil over her face as long as possible. The bridesmaids' quaint King Charles the First



costumes were pronounced charmingly picturesque, while the bride's own gown of silver brocade and white satin embroidered with seed pearls was, "Simply too wonderful for words, my dear!"

There was not a single hitch, either at the church or during the reception. The stately rooms of the Washington Square house were not overcrowded, the food was of the very best, the string orchestra did its duty almost if not quite to perfection, and to crown it all, there was plenty of champagne.

Not the shadow of a cloud marred Mrs. Hetherington's serenity; Valerie laughed, care-free; Lynneth began to dismiss her own forebodings, her feeling that something was about to happen. Nothing did—not until all but those who meant to wait for the departure of the bridal couple had taken their leave, and the younger guests were dancing.

Lisa had slipped away to change her gown. Lynneth was turning from one partner to another when the discreet Parkins appeared.

"You're wanted upstairs in the sitting room, please, Miss Lynneth."

Lynneth's hands grew cold. It had come at last! The instinct she had tried to deny had not been mistaken, after all! Murmuring a word of excuse to Ashby Lawrence, her new partner, she went quietly out of the room and up the broad stairs where the landings were banked with palms and roses, and so to the pretty sitting room in which she had had her first talk with Valerie, only a very few months ago. But the months seemed like years.

The door was closed. She tapped. Lisa's voice replied; "Come in!"

They were there, the three she had known she would find. Valerie, standing by the empty grate, one slipped foot on the fender, the light of a shaded lamp playing over her rose-coloured gown, a smile curving her exquisite mouth. On the other side of the room, as if he had

retreated as far as possible, Phil Armytage was barricaded behind a chair, his weak, handsome face flushed and sullen.

Neither of them held the centre of the stage. For once it was Lisa, not Valerie, who was the dominant figure, Lisa, divested of her bridal array, who stood in the middle of the room, erect and coldly smiling, with triumph flaming in her pale and greedy eyes. Near her, the magnificent mink coat she was to wear over her going-away gown was flung across a chair. Her shower bouquet, all white orchids and bride's roses and lilies-of-the-valley, was clasped lightly in both hands.

"Ah! Here's Lynneth now," she said. And in her metallic voice rang the triumph flaring from her pale eyes. "Lynneth, do you remember my coming to your room one rainy morning about a week ago?"

She had spoken quickly, as if to forestall the others.

"Yes, I remember." Lynneth's delicate brows were lifted in surprise at the abrupt question. What did it all mean?

"Valerie had left you a few minutes before, hadn't she?"

"Yes."

"She'd been lying on your couch?"

"Yes."

"Did you see me—do anything?"

Memory of a stooping figure, a snatching hand, leaped into Lynneth's mind. Instinctively she tried to avoid a direct reply.

"What on earth are you driving at, Lisa?"

Lisa's thin lips tightened. "You'll find out presently. What I want to know now is whether you——" She paused, with a deep-drawn breath; then went on firmly; "Whether you saw me pick anything up?"

"Suppose I won't tell you?"

"That would amount to admitting you did. It would do quite as well."

Lynneth made no answer. Neither of the others had as yet spoken a word.

"You saw me pick something white up off the couch and crush it in my hand, didn't you?"

In the pause that followed, Phil Armytage gave a little gasp, sharply, as if he were stifling. Valerie was still smiling. From below came snatches of music, the gay voices of the wedding guests. High above them all rippled a girl's clear laughter. They were enjoying themselves, down there.

"I won't answer any more questions until I know why you're asking them," declared Lynneth steadily.

"But you don't deny you saw me pick up something white, like—a piece of paper?"

Lynneth was silent. What was there to say? For Lisa spoke the truth, and she knew it.

"I'm glad your memory's so good," Lisa remarked sarcastically. She was silent a moment; her fingers tightened on her bouquet; her nostrils were pinched. Tiny white lines showed about them, and at the corners of her close-lipped mouth. She turned to Valerie; "Are you satisfied now that I really have got the letter?"

Still smiling, Valerie tossed her beautiful head. "Well, and suppose you have? What of it?"

"Just this," Lisa replied slowly, seeming to weigh the words and speaking with an almost incredible self-control. "Just this; the letter makes an appointment between you two, at eleven o'clock, when I will be safely out of the way."

Valerie hesitated. Lynneth, looking at her, saw that she was trying to remember the phrasing of the lost letter. Trying, and failing. Trepidation mingled with her defiance as she said; "And if it does? You know perfectly well——"

"Oh, yes! I know perfectly well that you haven't—risked anything. You're one of the people who never do risk anything, Valerie. You always take good care to



keep on the safe side. As a matter of fact," she added with a deliberation that was nothing short of horrible, so unhuman did it seem, "as a matter of fact I believe I'd have more respect for you if I thought you'd risked—everything!"

Driven at last to intervene; "Oh, see here now, Lisa!" Phil Armytage blustered, thumping the back of the chair behind which he had retreated; "See here now, you're going altogether too far! You're making a mountain out of a mole-hill. There's never been anything but fun——"

"Please remember there are other people in the house," Lisa interrupted.

Phil's was the first violent gesture that had been made, the first loud tone that had been used. . . .

"But I tell you there's never——"

"We'll have plenty of time to discuss that—on our honeymoon." Lisa again interrupted, with an accent that bit like acid. "Just now I only want you two, my very dear sister and my well-beloved husband, to know exactly where I stand and what I intend to do. You've enjoyed an extremely pleasant little flirtation, at my expense. Oh, I wasn't as miserable as you thought! But I'd made up my mind to marry Phil, and I didn't choose to be laughed at as the girl who let her sister steal her fiancé. Now, you see, the cards are in my hands! And if you two ever do anything to—annoy me, either of you, I'll bring suit for divorce against you, Phil, and name our dear Valerie as co-respondent. The newspaper accounts of the proceedings would probably be rather—entertaining!"

Phil's breath came sharply, whistling between his teeth. He smoothed the back of his sleek head automatically, with a shaky, fumbling hand.

On Valerie's lips the taunting smile had stiffened into an ugly grin. She tried to speak——

But it was Lynneth who cried out indignantly; "Lisa, you couldn't! You—couldn't! Your own sister——!"

"Exactly. My own *half*-sister." There was a kind of concentrated cruelty in her utterance of those four words. "That's just it, you see. My own *half*-sister."

"But even if you tried you couldn't do anything!" Phil exclaimed, furtively licking his dry lips. "You haven't a shred of evidence! You can't have, because there isn't any. There never was anything but fooling! It was awfully silly, of course, and I know it wasn't—wasn't very nice, but still—but still——"

If Lisa had interrupted him! If she had not let him go on with his pitiful exhibition! If she had shown only that much of mercy—or of weakness! But she who had waited so long, waited now until he stammered, and faltered, and stopped. And nothing but the occasional, uncontrollable twitching of her eyelids and the tense grip of her hands on the white bridal bouquet betrayed the strain she was under.

Her thin lips twisted into a smile.

"It's evident," she said with that same concentrated cruelty, "It's evident you've both forgotten what was in the letter. Phil's not as cool and cautious as you are, Valerie. Still, you must forgive the poor dear boy his infatuation! He oughtn't to have written quite so affectionately, though. And it would be better for you both if he'd dated it more fully than with only the day of the week! You see that, don't you? And now, perhaps you understand the sort of position you're in?" She paused, as though awaiting an answer.

In the silence, the distant music could be plainly heard. They were playing a lively fox-trot, and now the dancers caught up the rollicking tune and began to sing:

My jazz girl, my razzle-dazzle jazz girl,  
Whoo-pee, honey, get the money.  
You're my jazz girl!

It seemed to Lynneth as if that idiotic song put the

final touch of delirium to it all. Her brain was automatically repeating the chorus:

My jazz girl, my razzle-dazzle jazz girl——

Then at last Lisa spoke again, spoke as if the words were an afterthought; "There's something else, by the way. I'd advise you, my dear and very fascinating Valerie, not to engage yourself to any one without first consulting me. I might take it into my head to disturb your arrangements!"

And again it was Lynneth who tried to intervene. Not with futile entreaties or yet more futile appeals to a mercy she knew to be nonexistent. Lisa held whip and curb in her hands now, and she meant to use them—pitilessly. But it might be possible to bargain with her.

"Is there anything you'll take in exchange for that letter, Lisa?" she asked quietly.

Of them all, only Phil had raised his voice. And somehow the calmness of the scene, the apparent absence of excitement or of vituperation, added to its grimness. They were highly civilized people, people who controlled their voices, however much they might long to shriek aloud. Question, answer, statement of fact, had held a cruelty, a fear and a menace the more appalling for this very quietude. Beyond the closed door were servants, guests, relatives, no one of whom must be permitted even to suspect what was happening within.

Again the chorus beat up from below:

My jazz girl, my razzle-dazzle jazz girl——

And again Lynneth spoke, low and steadily; "Is there anything you'll take in exchange for that letter, Lisa? Any promise? Any—price?"

An instant the pale eyes met hers. And in that instant Lynneth knew that if Lisa were the torturer, she was also the tortured.



A wave of laughter surged up to them. Gay voices, the patter of dancing feet, the rollicking, syncopated chorus:

My jazz girl, my razzle-dazzle jazz girl——

Slowly Lisa shook her head. The paradise plume on her hat waved as if in mockery.

“No; none,” she said; and smiled.

Her hatred was like vitriol; so colourless, so innocuous it had seemed, while held in bondage by her mastering will! Now, suddenly released, it seared and burned.

Valerie, her arms on the mantelpiece, bowed her head upon them. Accustomed to an easy dominance, she could neither act nor speak. She was completely in the power of the half-sister she had ridiculed, amused herself by tormenting. Tolerant as was the society in which she moved, even its indulgence would not overlook a public, newspaper-exploited scandal. And when the scandal was so particularly ugly——!

Then Phil cried out, suddenly and shrilly; “I told you, Valerie, I told you we ought to break it off——”

“Shut up, you fool!” Valerie snarled.

And Lisa smiled again.

A tap at the door made them all start guiltily. Mrs. Hetherington came in.

“Lisa, darling,” she exclaimed, “every one’s beginning to wonder what’s keeping you! Oh, I see! You’ve been saying good-by to Valerie and Lynneth. That’s sweet of you, dear, but now you really must come. Where’s Phil?”

For Phil had slunk ignominiously out of sight behind a portière.

“He’s ready. He’ll meet me in the hall. Just help me on with my coat, Valerie, will you?”

Lynneth, springing forward, caught up the splendid garment. So much at least she could spare Valerie. . . .

Lisa accepted the substitution without comment. Her face was chalk-white, her mouth blue and a little sunken at the corners. But Lynneth knew there was no danger of any collapse on her part. What she planned she would carry through to the very end, no matter how bitter that end might be.

"Thanks," she said indifferently. "Now, mother!"

The easy tears stood in Mrs. Hetherington's eyes as she embraced her step-daughter. "Bless you, my darling! I hope you'll be so happy—! We'll miss you—" she choked, dried her eyes and went on; "Now, Valerie, kiss your sister once more, dear, then you and Lynneth run along. Her father wants to speak to her a minute."

Over the older woman's head, Lisa and Valerie looked at each other. Lynneth's nerves were quivering like over-taut violin strings. Another moment of this scene, this grotesque travesty, and they must snap . . . . There was nothing she could do, nothing she could say that would in the least mitigate the caustic irony of it all.

Her gaze drew Lisa's; and as she met the bride's eyes her own filled with pity.

And perhaps that was why Lisa showed an unlooked-for mercy.

"Valerie and I have finished our good-byes," she said; and added suddenly, with an odd softening in her harsh voice; "Good luck to you, little Lynneth!"

The faint breath of emphasis on the pronoun brought a quick mist to Lynneth's eyes. Lisa had shown herself cruel, ruthless, vindictive—but what had those two done to her? What kind of future could be in store for this bride who on her wedding day——

The gayety below seemed to leap up at her like a living thing as she started to go down the stairs.

An instant she recoiled. Then the traditions of a high-bred race—traditions of hospitality, of reserve, of the proud concealing of injury or pain—which were in her very blood, helped her onward. No one of all this crowd

must suspect that anything unusual had taken place. With head held high and a smile on her lips she ran lightly down the steps, tossing gay replies to the eager questions as to whether bride and bridegroom had stolen away, escaping the shower of rice and confetti prepared for them.

"No, oh no, indeed! They'll be down in a minute. Lisa's all ready. Oh, Mr. Saunders, where *did* you get that dilapidated slipper?"

Valerie, close behind her, accepted the offered shelter. In her quick and merry-sounding responses, Valerie's silence passed unnoticed.

A moment more and Lisa, followed by Phil Armytage, came hurrying down. On the landing she paused, lifting high her bouquet. And as the girls all stretched out eager hands to seize it, she flung it straight at Valerie. Instinctively, Valerie caught the flowers before they struck her. And seeing them in her grasp, Lisa laughed aloud.

Then amid the conventional shower of rice mingled with cries of "Good-by!" and "Good luck!" she ran down to the waiting, ribbon-bedecked limousine, with Phil at her heels. In another instant they were out of sight.



## CHAPTER NINTH

LYNNETH found herself pausing every now and then with a kind of surprised awareness of her ability to laugh and talk and take an animated part in the protracted festivities. For the reception was followed by a dinner and theatre-party for the bridesmaids and ushers and a few of the guests. There could be no relaxing of her strained muscles, no dropping of her mask. Yet every moment she was wondering what would happen to those two whose married life had begun so strangely, and so gruesomely.

Not until they reached the theatre, where lowered lights gave some protection, could she rest her weary nerves. While the other members of the party laughed and chattered, she leaned back in the shadows, closing her eyes.

From his place beside her, Danvers Calhoun noticed the closed eyes and the drooping corners of the soft mouth. It was a natural reaction, he thought, after the excitement of the wedding.

"Tired?" he whispered gently.

Lynneth opened her eyes. "A little. It's been rather—rather an exhausting day."

"I know," he murmured sympathetically. "You're so sensitive! You've got yourself all worked up."

Lynneth could not help smiling.

He took the smile for encouragement, and her nearness, the lowered lights, and the instinct which led him always to choose the effective, and what he believed to be the expected, all impelled him to say tenderly; "You oughtn't to be allowed to tire yourself out for other people! Flowers need care; they have to be protected by those who—who love them."

If his similes were a trifle mixed, his meaning was entirely plain. He had come, that day, to a decision.

"Oh, I'm no sensitive plant!" she replied lightly. "And if I were—well, the sooner I turn into a good tough weed, the better it'll be for me!" Her thoughts had abruptly reverted to the riddle which would so soon demand an answer: How was she to earn a living?

"If you were in *my* garden——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in a booming outburst of the chorus. But it was enough to tell her clearly what she had of late begun to suspect—that here, if she chose, was an answer to the riddle of the future.

This man beside her; was he her destiny? Was the normal woman's lot she longed for to come to her through him?

The "No" that rose instantly to her brain was as distinct as it was unhesitating. Danvers Calhoun was not even a possibility.

The lights flashed up. That jubilant chorus had been the last number of the act. There was a general stir and movement, a shifting of places, making confidential talk impossible. Calhoun swore inwardly; if he could have had just a few minutes more!

On his way homeward he forced himself to think things over with the calculating coolness he approved and did all he could to cultivate. He had made up his mind. He was going to ask Lynneth Frear to marry him.

He was sure she would accept his offer, and that gratefully. Wouldn't it, frankly speaking, be quite a piece of luck for her? She hadn't any money; no one else, so far as he knew, wanted to marry her, and she couldn't go on living with the Hetheringtons forever! If she wasn't in love with him yet, that was only because she was very young and shy and—well, virginal. Which, after all, was one of the principal reasons why he wanted her.

His thoughts returned approvingly to his talk with Ashby Lawrence that same afternoon. Walking beside

such a personage from the church to Washington Square had given him no small degree of pleasure. It was something merely to be seen with Ashby Lawrence.

"When they *do* do anything, the Hetheringtons do it well," Lawrence had commented as they turned down Fifth Avenue. "That was an admirably arranged affair."

"It's funny how often weddings are bungled! They're so much alike you'd think people could go through them with their eyes shut!"

"They do, very often; then when they open them they get divorced. Even at that, I sometimes wonder how any man can have the nerve to marry one of these post-war *débutantes*. Or why,"—in a reflective tone—"he should want to!"

"Same old reason, I suppose," Calhoun suggested.

"Love? That word covers more emotions than charity does sins. But marriage implies some small amount of domesticity even in the most modern families, and domesticity with a pinch-beck *cocotte* doesn't strike me as amusing. After all, the great advantage the girls men married had over the—er—the kind they didn't, was that they were different. They provided novelty, a change. But this new generation seems bent on eliminating the difference!"

"I agree with you. Marrying one of them must be a good deal like wearing second-hand clothing." Calhoun was speaking more earnestly than he realized. The subject was deeply interesting to him then, when he was collecting reasons for acting according to his inclinations. "I admit I wouldn't enjoy wondering how many of the men who came to my house had taken joy-rides between dances with my wife! They're all very well to play about with, these little girls, and you don't have to think what you say to them—anything goes. But for marrying——!"

"Most of them seem to me to rush to one or other of two extremes. They either try to behave as if they belonged to a sort of neuter gender, or they emphasize their sex in the crassest possible manner. The American



woman has never learned to be fast without being vulgar; the risqué isn't her natural element, and when she gets into it she's merely clumsy. Of course I'm an old foggy, but I must say I don't grasp the modern girl's point of view. When a man has no more respect for his wife than he has for himself—or not so much!—it's a pretty poor outlook for the woman."

Calhoun wondered what Lawrence thought of Lynneth Frear. But though usually anything but a diffident person, he was oddly shy about mentioning her name.

"Of course there are exceptions," he remarked vaguely.

Amusement shone in the older man's eyes. He gave Calhoun a considering glance. The desire to manipulate, or at least affect human lives, strongest generally in those who have no children, was influencing him now. Little of the current gossip failed to reach him, and his memory was of the best.

"Rare ones. Still, if I had a nephew—which I haven't—and he'd listen to my advice—which he most certainly wouldn't!—I'd counsel him to think about that charming little Miss Frear. She's got brains, that girl, and she isn't looking for a career. She'd help a man succeed! And there's nothing of the——"

"Pinch-beck *cocotte*?" Calhoun put in, quoting Lawrence's phrase.

"Exactly! Nothing of the pinch-beck *cocotte* about her."

All of which had given Calhoun a good deal to think of, at once confirming and expanding his original point of view.

At bottom he was domestically inclined; and he was tired of bachelor quarters and cabaret suppers. Like the majority of his kind, he was intensely conservative in many of his ideas. He liked petting parties for himself, but he wanted his kisses to be the first to touch his wife's lips. He was in many ways an entirely commonplace person.

As fragments of the afternoon's conversation came back to him, he felt he had a right to congratulate himself upon his choice. All the more because no one could say it wasn't disinterested! And he could well afford to marry. The period of inflated rentals through which New York was then passing had caused the Land Development Company with which he was connected to flourish exceedingly. Not rich, as riches are reckoned on Manhattan Island, he would be perfectly able to take an apartment, if not on Park Avenue, at least in an adjacent street, and later, when the children came, perhaps a house in a really first-class suburb. That sort of thing would be useful for publicity purposes, now that he had about decided to go into politics. A pretty wife and a couple of babies were splendid assets for a would-be—say, member of Congress? or Senator? Lawrence, a man of the world who knew what he was talking about, had called Lynneth Frear "charming." And marriage with Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington's niece would firmly establish his still somewhat precarious social footing.

But that Lynneth should instantly have determined to refuse him was something which, had he known it, would have amazed a good deal more than it would have distressed him. For the beggar maid to decline King Cophetua's offer and prefer the high road is against all romance and precedent. Yet this was precisely what Lynneth had decided to do.

## CHAPTER TENTH

SHE passed a wakeful night, thinking intently, not of Calhoun and the offer she now felt tolerably sure he intended to make her, but of the question as to how and where she was to earn enough money to provide herself with such unromantic necessities as food and shelter.

She wanted, was determined to leave the Hetheringtons', and at once. The great luxurious house had become odious to her, gruesome, hate-haunted. . . .

She shivered. Though low tones had been substituted for shrieks, threats of disgrace for the less subtle ones of poison or the knife, the smooth outward appearances preserved in every scrupulous detail, the horror was not lessened, but rather increased.

For Lisa was prepared to murder, not Valerie, but Valerie's good name; Valerie had poisoned, not Lisa, but the future which might have brought Lisa contentment at least, if not happiness.

Better a garret where the air was clean, than her dainty room in this hate-haunted house! Better scrub floors for a living than go on breathing an atmosphere of lies and vengeance and abominable intrigue!

Lynneth, it should be added, had never lived in a garret, nor had she ever scrubbed a floor. But she was absolutely sincere, for all her youthful grandiloquence.

During the night the wind shifted, and in the morning a drizzling, half-hearted sort of rain had begun to fall. Lynneth was not sorry to see it. Mrs. Hetherington detested wet weather, and never went out on a stormy day except to keep some important engagement.

She waited until half-past eleven, by which hour she knew the daily interviews with cook and butler would be



over; then went straight to her aunt's sitting room. She had no planned phrases ready to explain her going; she only knew that go she must. No feather-pillow resistance should turn the edge of her decision this time!

And once inside the room, words came with a rush.

"Dear Aunt Honoria, you know I told you quite a while ago I wouldn't be able to stay on here after—the wedding. I can't be dependent on you and Uncle Hetherington. You've been most awfully kind to me—I'll never forget—but I can't—I can't go on this way any longer. I've just got to support myself!" She paused, breathless. Her cheeks were very pink, her eyes full of light.

"I was about to send for you." Mrs. Hetherington's serenity was unimpaired, though covered, so to speak, with a coating of frost. "I want to talk to you very seriously indeed."

"I'm sure I can get some sort of secretarial work," Lynneth went on, a little less quickly. She felt the chill in Mrs. Hetherington's manner, but was too intent on her own resolve to let it immediately check her. "I'll take a furnished room somewhere; Miss Hilary says lots of girls no older than I am are living alone in New York. I'm sure I'll be all right! It isn't right, though, for me to go on living here like this when I feel—when I haven't any money." She had changed the end of that impetuous sentence, and changed it just in time.

Mrs. Hetherington's gesture barely escaped being impatient. "I've told you before, Lynneth, that your Uncle Hetherington and I would arrange everything for you. You certainly can't live alone in New York, no matter what some girls may do. They're not girls of your class. I want to speak to you about something else, something I heard only last night, which has—er—grieved me very much."

Lynneth flinched. Who could have told Aunt Honoria—and what had they told her? No one knew of the

scene in the sitting room! Or had some one, some busy-body, overheard in spite of the lowered voices? Poor Aunt Honoria! It would hurt her so! She'd prided herself on never discriminating in the least between the two she called her daughters, and to know how they really felt towards each other—! Oh, poor Aunt Honoria!

She was still standing. She went a step nearer to Mrs. Hetherington, her own affairs forgotten. "I'm so sorry," she said distressfully. "I hoped you'd never know! It was mean to tell you! I'm dreadfully sorry!"

"I'm sorry too, Lynneth," Mrs. Hetherington said coldly. "I thought I could trust you. I'm sorry I was mistaken."

Lynneth stared at her, too surprised to be angry. "Mistaken? What in the world do you mean?"

"Don't make matters worse by trying to prevaricate, Lynneth. I know very well that nowadays young girls do a great many things that would have been considered most improper when *I* was a *débutante*, but I did think that you, my niece and a guest in my house, would at least have a sufficient sense of decency to consider my wishes, as well as your own reputation."

Lynneth's eyes darkened suddenly. "Any one who dares to say I haven't, lies!"

Mrs. Hetherington immediately hedged. Tears, denials, evasions, she had expected, and been prepared for; but not this white flame of anger.

"Of course you understand, my dear, that I don't for a moment believe you've ever been more than rather wild, and—er—foolish. You're very young and inexperienced——"

"Please explain." Lynneth's voice was steady, her slight young body erect, held taut as a drawn bow-string. "I don't know what you're talking about. Please explain."

"I will." A sense that she was, not dominating, but being dominated, treated, not as an infallible judge, but

as an accuser who might and would be called to account, was rousing Mrs. Hetherington's sluggish indignation. "Mrs. Gresham came to me yesterday, just after Lisa left, and told me she'd seen you go for a—a joy ride, I believe they call it, between dances with a man named Tressel. She said you were away with him for nearly an hour, alone, in a public taxi, after midnight. Now what have you to say for yourself?"

What could she say? It was as if a door had been slammed in her face. What could she say? How could she defend herself without breaking her promise to Valerie?

And just then Valerie came in.

Lynneth's first feeling was one of release, and relief. But the relief lasted only for a moment. What saved her, would bring trouble to Valerie, and sorrow to Valerie's mother. She instinctively expected Valerie to tell the truth, because it was what she herself would have done in Valerie's place.

"What's the matter?" asked Valerie, instantly apprehensive.

"Shut the door, darling, and I'll tell you. I don't want the servants to hear." Mrs. Hetherington paused impressively. "I think you ought to know why your father and I have decided to send Lynneth straight to Miss De Witt, instead of taking her to Aitken with us, as we'd intended."

"What's Lynneth done?"

"Weren't you at the Vances' the evening she went off in a taxi with a man named Tressel?"

A just perceptible stiffening of Valerie's exquisite features, a settling of her lovely face into mask-like lines.

"Yes. I was there."

That was all she said. It was enough.

"Why did you let her go? You know how people talk!"

Valerie relaxed into a chair with a shrug of her grace-



ful shoulders. "I'm not Linnie's governess! She knew what she was doing, all right."

Linneth was looking at her. She knew it, and kept her head averted.

"Valerie! You don't mean to tell me Linneth has been in the habit of doing that sort of thing!"

Another shrug. "How can I be expected to know all about other girls' goings-on?" An instant, and then, conscious despite her averted glance of the scorn in those accusing grey eyes, she added hastily; "I never knew Linnie to behave that way before or since. It was—it was probably all Mr. Tressel's fault!"

There was a splendid hint for Linneth's benefit! She could excuse herself nicely by using it, thought Valerie with considerable satisfaction.

And Linneth turned from her then, as one turns from that which is unclean.

Very quietly, though every vestige of colour was gone from her cheeks and her hands were tightly clenched in the effort to keep her self-control, she said; "It wasn't in any way Major Tressel's fault. I—suggested going. He went because I—because I wanted him to."

She could not break her promise, and Valerie didn't intend to tell the truth. But no matter what happened, Geoffrey Tressel shouldn't be blamed!

"Really, Linneth, I'm surprised at you!" Mrs. Hetherington declared weakly. She was finding herself curiously unable to cope with the situation. This pale girl with the steady eyes and proud bearing—it seemed ridiculous to suppose that she could or would have asked any man to go on a midnight drive with her! A joy ride! In the bottom of her heart Mrs. Hetherington was sure she hadn't done anything of the kind. There must have been a reason of which she knew nothing—and didn't want to know anything. There lay the real crux of it all, in the fact that she wanted a valid excuse for getting rid

of Lynneth, not by acceding to the girl's frequently repeated desire to go to work and earn her own living, but by putting her in the safe keeping of the austere Miss De Witt. So far as Mrs. Hetherington herself was concerned, she liked Lynneth, and thought her a convenience; it was Valerie's suggestion that Lynneth was a nuisance to *her*, which influenced Valerie's mother.

"I don't think there can be any more question about my going. You understand, of course, that I shan't stay here any longer."

"I'll send word to Miss De Witt——"

"I'm not going to Miss De Witt."

"Your uncle and I are your guardians, Lynneth. We're responsible for you, and you must do as we say."

"No. I'm sorry this has happened, Aunt Honoria. I'll never forget how kind you were to me. But I can't take anything from you when you think such—such dreadful things of me. There was some money left from the sale of the house. Please use it to pay for my clothes and all, and if it isn't enough I'll try——" Suddenly, sharply, her voice broke and the tears came. "Oh, why couldn't you trust me?" she cried; and ran out of the room.

That appeal was too much for Mrs. Hetherington, a selfish and self-centred woman, not a callous one. Almost she went after Lynneth, would have gone after her indeed, had not Valerie's drawl checked the generous impulse:

"Poor little Linnie! Being found out has upset her dreadfully!"

Valerie had been a great deal with Lynneth; Valerie must know exactly how Lynneth had been behaving, Mrs. Hetherington told herself comfortingly. But twinges of compunction troubled her, especially when at luncheon Wilbur announced:

"Miss Frear won't be down, madam. She says she's got a headache, and don't want nothin' to eat."

Mrs. Hetherington sighed faintly. Why hadn't Mrs. Gresham held her tongue? Then there wouldn't have been any of this fuss! It wasn't over yet, either. She'd have to have another talk with Lynneth, by and by. Oh dear, what a nuisance it all was!

She never dreamed that while Wilbur was making her excuses, Lynneth was tiptoeing downstairs, carrying her tightly packed suitcase.

Holding her breath, she softly opened the heavy hall door. The smallest, teeniest noise might betray her. She wasn't going to let them send her off to prison at Miss De Witt's! And her ideas of the law were hazy in the extreme. She didn't know what powers it might or might not give her guardians. But this she did know: once out of the house and established as a self-supporting woman, even the law wouldn't find it easy to bring her back again!

Softly, with the utmost gentleness, the heavy door was permitted to swing to behind her.

She was free!

At the top of the short flight of steps leading to the sidewalk she paused an instant. The pavements were still dark and glistening with the recent rain, but overhead the sky was blue, and the white clouds were scurrying to shelter before a brisk wind, like naughty children running from a nurse. Where she stood was damp and shadowy, but beyond, over the Square, the sun was shining.

With a quick lift of her head and a straightening of her slender shoulders, she went swiftly down the steps and round the corner.





BOOK II  
LIVINGSTON PLACE





## BOOK II

### LIVINGSTON PLACE

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#### CHAPTER FIRST

THE day had turned into a deceptively mild one, with a hint of spring in the air. One shoulder sagging under the weight of her heavy suitcase, Lynneth clambered into a Fifth Avenue 'bus. The bag was a nuisance. She couldn't carry it around all afternoon! But what to do with it? She remembered hearing of some one checking and leaving a suitcase at the Grand Central. She got out at Forty-second Street, and went to the station, where she disposed of her burden. The surmounting of the small difficulty gave her a delicious sense of capability and confidence.

She was going straight to the little book-shop on a side street in the Fifties near Madison Avenue, where she hoped to see Joan Hilary. Joan would help her to find work, would at least tell her where and how to look for it. The soft moist breeze and pale gold sunshine made walking a delight. She went lightly and quickly forward, hastening up Madison Avenue in the daffodil yellow of the early April afternoon.

The little book-shop "At the Sign of the Broken Spindle" occupied the basement floor of what had once been a handsome private house, now in the transition stage of being rented out piecemeal. The front room, designed for a breakfast room, had a large open fire-place, a tall wainscot, painted white, and a bow window. Big, leather-

covered chairs, quaint side-lights, tables strewn with magazines and reviews, made it very different from the usual shop. Madge Ayres, Joan's partner, was busy with a customer. Lynneth had recognized the well-shaped head, slightly frosted at the temples, the low voice and courtly manner, before Ashby Lawrence turned and saw her.

"Miss Frear, by all that's delightful!" he exclaimed. "I hadn't hoped to see you again before you went to Aitken."

"I'm not going to Aitken. I've left Washington Square!" Lynneth impetuously declared; and stopped.

He had noted the dark lines under her eyes, her look of excitement. Experience had given him some skill in the adding of two and two. He had divined her suppressed apprehension when she left him the previous afternoon, and now her exclamation confirmed his suspicion that something was wrong. He wanted to help her, to do something for her; but how could he?

Repressing her impatience, and turning to that blessedly safe topic, the weather, Lynneth chatted for a minute or two. Then asked Mrs. Ayres when she could see Miss Hilary?

"Why now, if you like. She's in the office. If you don't mind going straight through the passage?"

Lynneth hurried through the pantry and former kitchen, now the receiving and packing rooms, to the small extension in the rear, once the laundry, now dignified by the title of private office. As she neared the door it was suddenly flung open, and a young woman dressed in the extreme of the then prevailing fashion, with the shortest of skirts, the sheerest of stockings, and the largest of ear-pads, bounced out in a state of intense indignation.

She had omitted to close the door, and as Lynneth approached:

"Hello!" exclaimed Joan Hilary. "Where did you drop from? Thought you were all off to Aitken."

"I'm not staying with Aunt Honoria now," Lynneth explained. "I've left Washington Square, and I'm looking for something to do."

Joan thrust out her lower lip, twisting her lank body sidewise on the chair. "Career?" she demanded brusquely.

Lynneth's eyes twinkled. "No; a job."

"Thank God!" Joan remarked succinctly. "If you're sure you're not a neglected genius—— Look here! What can you do? Run a typewriter?"

"Oh, yes! Only I'm afraid I'm not very fast."

"Then for goodness' sake sit down over there and see if you can decipher my scrawl! Just fired that wooden-headed gum-chewer you saw go out. Part of our business is fixing up special lists of books for people, and damned if she didn't send one headed 'Elimination of the Child' to a female with three Pokes and no kids, who wanted to study up on educating the Chinese!"

Lynneth laughed. And when Lynneth laughed, her eyes became full of tiny dancing lights. She had pulled her gloves off, and in an instant the typewriter began to click. Joan's writing did look as if a couple of belligerent sparrows had inked their feet and fought all over the paper, but Lynneth was used to handling her father's large correspondence with celebrated illegibles. Her knowledge of books, too, helped her greatly.

As soon as she had finished, Joan took one look at the work, dropped her tortoise-shell eyeglasses, and demanded abruptly; "See here! How'd you like to stay on with me? I warn you, it isn't a job; it's a hodge-podge! No eight-hour business about it! You'll have to be ready to do any old thing that needs doing, whether it's looking after customers, making out bills or delivering bundles—— isn't much of that, just warning you——emergencies will



happen! May go bankrupt any minute, and the pay's rotten. Want to try it?"

"When shall I begin? Now?"

"Good girl! Go to it! Strong on figures?"

Lynneth shook her head. "Not a bit."

"Neither am I." Joan thrust out her lower lip meditatively. "Tell you what!" she exclaimed cheerfully; "add up those accounts and see what result you get! *I've had three!*"

It was after five o'clock when Lynneth finished her work, and suddenly remembered she had nowhere to sleep that night. She said a little diffidently; "I'm afraid I'll have to go now. I must hunt up some sort of lodging. Do you know of any—any hotel that isn't too dreadfully expensive?"

"Good Lord, child! You don't mean to say you've been figuring away there when you haven't anywhere to go? Come home with me and I'll put you up on a sofa for the night. Then tomorrow you can start househunting."

Lynneth appreciated the delicacy which asked no questions. She explained a little—as much as she could without telling Valerie's secret; "I had to leave Washington Square all of a sudden. I—I sort of quarreled with Aunt Honoria. She thought I'd done something horrid, and—and I couldn't stand it."

Joan nodded. "Bring anything with you?"

"I left my suitcase at the Grand Central."

"Well, run along and get it, and meet me at my place."

Lynneth had barely left the shop when Joan's telephone rang. Ashby Lawrence was on the wire.

"Is that you, Joan? Joan, I'm rather bothered about little Miss Frear. There was something wrong in Washington Square yesterday afternoon. I don't think any one else noticed it——"

"I did! I'm keeping Lynneth with me. She's all right."

Lawrence hesitated. "Is there anything I can do? It's so difficult——"

"No. She wants to earn her living, and as good luck would have it, I was able to give her a job. There's been a row in the Hetherington mausoleum. Thought there would be, some day."

"Well, the Hetheringtons can take care of themselves, but the girl's as innocent and helpless as a kitten——"

"She's got a good level head on her shoulders, just the same! When did you take to being a squire of dames, Ashby?"

"Squire of children would be more like it in this case! You'll let me know if there's anything I can do?"

Her quick ear noted the slight stiffening of his tone. She frowned a little. "Of course I will, old thing. Good night!"

She was biting her lip as she hung up the receiver. Would she ever learn to control her tongue?

After dinner in a nearby tea room, Lynneth and Joan spent the evening making up a list of "Furnished Rooms" for Lynneth to investigate next day, Joan acting as censor. It was a long list, and when morning came Lynneth started out optimistically, in spite of fog and the drizzling rain brought by a cold north-east wind.

Any one who has ever tried to find inexpensive quarters in a large city knows the kind of experiences she had. It was late in the afternoon; she had climbed miles of stairs and interviewed innumerable landladies when, chilled through and so tired she could have sat down and cried, she wearily ascended the chipped and crumbling stoop of a dingy brownstone house on one of the side streets just off Livingston Place. It was one of those plaintive houses which, having sunk listlessly through degrees of steadily lessening gentility until they have at last reached those lowermost depths whose sign is a "Furnished Rooms" card in the front parlor window, seem to

be helplessly waiting for some one to be kind enough to come along and pull them down. On this dismal afternoon of dense grey fog, limply dissolving at times into mizzling rain, when all the world seemed wet and shivering and generally wretched, No. — Livingston Place was dreariness itself.

A woman of indeterminate age, with a pair of nickel-rimmed spectacles astride the bridge of a pinched red nose, sandy hair twisted into a tight, aggressive knob, and a waist and skirt of rusty black, which looked as if they had been made from the scantiest possible amount of material, opened the door, eyeing her suspiciously.

Yes, she had advertised, she sourly admitted. No, the room wasn't rented. Yes, it could be seen at once.

The room was at the top of the four-story house. Lynne<sup>1</sup> sighed involuntarily, then rallied her courage. She *must* find a place! Determinedly she faced the long flights of stairs permeated with the complex odours inherited from many generations of meals, toiling up and up after her loud-breathing conductress, from the carpeted first to the oil-clothed second, and then to the bare boards of the third.

At last the landlady opened a door. Lynne knitted her delicate brows, staring about the small comfortless room with its streaked and ugly wall-paper—cabbage roses on a mustard-coloured ground—single chest of drawers covered by a coarse, red-bordered towel, one straight-backed chair, wooden wash-stand holding a much-nicked basin and pitcher, and humpy, creaking bed.

It was cheerless enough, in all conscience. But it was spotlessly clean, and some of the rooms shown her——! Moreover, it had possibilities. Her home-making instinct awoke. Fresh curtains at the dormer windows, books on the shelves by the bed, the purchase of a few yards of chintz, perhaps eventually a rug on the painted, chocolate-brown floor—it would be fun to fix it up!



Not hours, but months seemed to have passed since she had left Washington Square.

Her face reflected her thoughts; and the suspicious eyes behind the spectacles softened as they watched her, exactly as Ashby Lawrence's worldly-wise ones had so often done.

"How much is it?" she asked.

The landlady hesitated, glanced shrewdly at the well-cut coat and skirt. "Eight dollars a week."

Lynneth shook her head. "I'm sorry. I can't pay so much."

Again the landlady hesitated. "Would you be permanent, miss?"

"Why, yes—I think so."

"Well, then—we might say—six?"

So in less than forty-eight hours after her abrupt departure from Washington Square, Lynneth was provided with the two great necessities—a roof over her head, and a job. She was surprised at her own good fortune; had she been a little less inexperienced, she would have been dumbfounded.

## CHAPTER SECOND

WHEN Lynneth suddenly departed from Washington Square, she left a note for Mrs. Hetherington. Later on she sent another note, telling where she was and what she was doing. But no word came in reply.

It was Ashby Lawrence who told Calhoun of her changed circumstances. A few days after she had assumed the rôle of general utility woman "At the Sign of the Broken Spindle" he stopped in on the pretext of wanting some novels for a sick friend and found her there, shyly efficient and very much at home. Mrs. Ayres had gone to lunch, and Joan was interviewing a salesman in her private office. Being the only customer present, Lawrence permitted himself to indulge his slightly cynical curiosity.

"I've missed meeting you around," he said, glancing through one and another of the gayly bound volumes she brought him. "When are you going back to Washington Square? Not until Mrs. Hetherington returns from Aitken?"

Lynneth shook her head. She looked very small and slim, childish almost, in her quaint little grey gown, but there was plenty of determination in her firm chin and steady eyes.

"I'm not going back at all," she replied briefly. Then added; "I was only there for a visit. I've my living to earn."

Lawrence glanced at her speculatively. From the soft dark coils of hair on the top of her little head to the tiny buckled shoes on her slender high-arched feet, she was as different as possible from the traditional business woman. That anything so dainty should go down into

the dust of the arena seemed to him thoroughly incongruous.

"It's a good bit of a change, isn't it?" he remarked tentatively.

The dancing lights shone in her eyes as she smiled. "It's a new experience, and I like experiences. I'm willing to try anything—once!"

Something in her fresh, unspoilt youth, something in her bright eager courage, made him temporarily dissatisfied with his chosen part of amused spectator, voluntarily standing aside from the game.

"You're right," he said slowly, "you're altogether right not to be afraid of experiences. It's the empty life that is the unhappy life!"

"Oh, but I am afraid!" Lynne avowed frankly. "I'm not a bit brave, really. I get dreadfully scared, sometimes! But if you have to do things, it's silly to make a fuss, isn't it?"

Another customer came in, and the talk was over. But brief as it had been, each took from it a phrase and a memory. Deep into the girl's impressionable mind had sunk Lawrence's words, "It's the empty life that is the unhappy life," and his look of regret as he uttered them, while he on his part never forgot that little lift of the head with which she had declared, "If you have to do things, it's silly to make a fuss."

No, she wouldn't make a fuss, he felt sure. Whatever happened, she would meet with a smile, and her chin up. But if Joan's enterprise should come to grief and this exquisite young thing be forced out among the heedless currents of the business world, a bit of finest porcelain tossed about amid pots of brass and of iron——? He'd hate to see her smashed!

So when he chanced, a couple of nights later, to meet Calhoun in the promenade back of the parterre boxes at the Metropolitan, he made a point of speaking to him.

"They tell me you're going into politics! Tom Grant



of the Citizens' League said they were thinking of putting you up in the primaries next fall. What's the idea?"

"Don't you think it's about time a few decent men did try to do something?" Calhoun, taken by surprise, fell back on a stock phrase.

Lawrence smiled. "My dear fellow! Do you really think you can accomplish anything by getting on the Board of Aldermen, or going to Albany?"

"At least I can try!"

"Why waste energy on a sure thing? This city of ours doesn't *want* to be governed by honest men. Look what it did to Mayor Mitchell!"

"You're not much of an optimist, are you?"

Lawrence chuckled good-naturedly. "I take things as they are. You can call that cynicism, if you like. Plenty of my friends do! Joan Hilary says I ought to be marooned on a desert island. She's always emphatic in her opinions, isn't she?"

"I've only met her once or twice at the Hetheringtons'."

"Yes, of course. She's some sort of connection of theirs. I wonder how they like her taking Miss Frear into the shop? I know poor old 'Blazing Bleeck' was horrified when she went into trade herself."

"I thought Miss Frear had gone to Aitken!" Calhoun's surprise was unmistakably genuine.

"Not a bit of it! She's working in Joan Hilary's bookshop."

Lawrence left it there, giving Calhoun a nod of farewell, and turning to greet Mrs. Gresham.

To say that Calhoun was dismayed, is putting it mildly. If he had been prepared to play Cophetua, it was with the tacit understanding that the beggar maid's little bare feet should be quite unstained by the dust of the highroad. To take a portionless bride from No. — Washington Square North was one thing; to take her from the "Sign of the Broken Spindle" very decidedly another.

He was a prudent young man; he meant to succeed, and he did not mean that anything should interfere with his success. But he had a code of his own, and if he had committed himself——?

But had he committed himself? That night at the theatre he had wished and intended Lynneth to take him seriously. Still, you never can tell about a woman!

The inscrutability of the female is a comforting adage to the vacillating male.

Calhoun decided to go and see Lynneth. Congratulating himself on his power of cool, unemotional judgment, he did not realize that he was yielding, partly to his own craving and partly to his belief that this was what Ashby Lawrence expected of him. He went to the "Sign of the Broken Spindle."

He had intended his coming to appear accidental, a "Why, Miss Frear!" sort of affair. But Lynneth was in the private office, struggling with Joan over the monthly accounts—a hectic matter which usually brought them both to the verge of nervous prostration—and Madge Ayres was alone in the shop. Calhoun procrastinated as much as he could, but he was at an evident disadvantage, and Mrs. Ayres, a shrewd little woman for all her doll-baby face, soft voice and deprecating manner, contrived to make him purchase a number of expensive volumes he did not in the least desire.

As minute after minute went by, and Lynneth still failed to appear, his longing to see her increased. Denial of her presence made it valuable.

At last; "I was told Miss Frear was here," he said stiffly.

"She's in the office with Miss Hilary. Will you take these with you, or shall I have them sent?" Madge Ayres replied coolly. Calhoun's abstracted manner had piqued her. She wasn't going to make things easy for him, being just old enough to resent abstraction on the part of any man.

She had failed to perceive that Calhoun's most pronounced characteristic was obstinacy.

"Will you find out whether I can see her, please?"

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid it wouldn't do to disturb her." From pique, Mrs. Ayres had passed to antagonism.

"When will she be at liberty?"

"I haven't any idea."

"Tomorrow afternoon?"

"It's impossible to say. The business——" Mrs. Ayres stopped short as Lynneth opened the door.

"Do you know what became of that extra copy of *One Man's View*? Joan said she—— Oh, Mr. Calhoun! How do you do?"

Her voice and manner were a disturbing surprise to Calhoun. She hadn't started, she hadn't blushed. The hand he took was neither hot nor cold. It didn't tremble in the least; its clasp was as unemotionally cordial as that of a well-bred boy.

Calhoun recited platitudes while trying to guess the riddle of her self-possession. That any girl should so receive a man she knew to have been on the brink of proposing to her, was against all his conventions. It is so difficult not to over-estimate one's own importance in other people's lives!

But his innate stubbornness was aroused, and when Lynneth said; "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me now. I haven't finished my work," his instant reply was, "When can I come to see you?"

"Not at all, I'm afraid. I'm living in a rooming house, and there isn't any place——"

"Can't I come here, then?"

Her reply was not encouraging; "We're usually pretty busy!"

Here was further denial to increase his determination.

"You can't be busy all the time! I'll stop in and take you out to tea," he almost threatened.

"Well, some day, perhaps!"



It was a dismissal rather than an agreement. Before the door had fairly closed behind him she had put him out of her mind and gone back to Joan.

"What the dickens have you been up to?" demanded Miss Hilary. Her usually smooth hair was in the wildest disorder. She had a trick of running her fingers through it when worried or perplexed, and now it looked positively Bolshevistic.

"Man came in and would talk," Lynneth responded briefly, sitting down at her own side of the table.

Miss Hilary snorted—no other word will express it. "My word! Way some of these imbeciles come in here and jaw, you'd think we'd nothing to do but listen to their asinine gabble!"

"Madge sold him most of the books we've been trying hardest to get rid of. Trust her!"

"What did he want with you, then?" Joan was still belligerent.

"Oh, I used to see a good deal of him when I was playing around."

"So that's it, then?"

Lynneth looked up, smiling. "To a certain and strictly limited extent, that's it."

"Meaning by which——?"

"A good deal less than you're imagining! There isn't—oh, well, there isn't anything serious."

"On your part, or his?"

"Both. Or at least—oh, you know how men talk!"

Joan winced. But Lynneth wasn't looking at her, and failed to see the wincing.

After a second's pause; "Implying I'm not to lose my female Figaro just yet?" asked Joan with resolute lightness.

"No!" Lynneth's smile betrayed the tiny dimple that hid near a corner of her mouth. "Not unless you throw her out! Did you get that schedule checked up? I've got to write to Fleming & Foster. Six of the ten copies of

*The Right of the North* they sent us are misprints. What gets into these publishers, anyway?"

And Lynneth grappled vigorously with a mass of correspondence in which she believed herself enormously interested. But what she really cared about was Joan, not Joan's business. Intelligent, and fond of books, her work held her as much as anything of the sort could have done, but she was essentially a woman of affections, not of impersonal interests. By temperament as by training, she was of those whose careers consist in serving, loyally and lovingly, the ambitions of another. Ashby Lawrence had been right in saying that Lynneth Frear would make an ideal wife for a public man.

Joan and Joan's affairs now claimed her devotion. Thrown constantly together, the attraction which had first drawn them to each other grew and strengthened daily. For Lynneth, to live without loving would have been like living in a room whose windows were never opened. And though there were times when they clashed, when Joan was irritable and Lynneth lost her temper, these were only surface disturbances, which passed even more quickly than they came.

Madge Ayres, third member of the trio, regarded the business as a temporary expedient, and said so frankly. She was working for herself only until she could find some man to work for her.

"I've tried romance," she averred one morning, when she and Lynneth were alone in the shop. "Moonshine and roses and love in a cottage and all the rest of it. Ugh! The windows were draughty and the floors creaked and the chimneys didn't draw, and I had to wash the dishes. Romance and grease are absolutely incompatible! You can be quite fond of a man in a Park Avenue apartment you'd perfectly abhor in a Harlem flat."

"But why go to either extreme?" inquired Lynneth conversationally, from her perch on one of the big tables.

"Oh, it's all very well for young things like you to talk,

my child! But one has to make hay while the sun shines, and I haven't so very many hours of daylight left."

"Nonsense, Madge!"

"Nonsense nothing! Only the speedy acquisition of a husband, plus a limousine and a French maid, will save me from becoming a walking fake with manufactured eyebrows and a transformation. No unattached woman can afford the comforts of middle-age."

"You're positively mid-Victorian, Madge! Nowadays women can look after themselves, and afford to do as they please."

"Piffle, my dear, simply and entirely piffle! Outside of opera singers and movie stars, how many women make real money? A ten-thousand dollar salary for a woman is a thing to be mentioned with awe; for a man, it's a commonplace. All this talk about economic independence only means that men are trying to sneak out of their one great duty—being useful to women. What else are they good for?"

"I see!" Lynneth's eyes were dancing. "You're willing to sacrifice yourself in order to reclaim some erring man to his proper duties!"

"Precisely! And my advice is, 'Go thou and do likewise!'" There was a strain of seriousness beneath the flippancy of her tone.

Lynneth smiled, and did not answer. Her memory held a treasure-box, safely locked away. She waited, and knew that she was waiting—what need of more?



## CHAPTER THIRD

APRIL had gone. May was going, and still Lynneth heard nothing from the house on Washington Square. This silent ignoring hurt her. Though she could never think of that last interview without a flare of anger, she had not forgotten previous kindnesses. Then late one afternoon, as they were hurriedly putting things in order for the night, Mr. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington himself walked in on them.

He gave a curt "How do you do?" to Joan who, leaning against one of the big tables, her eyeglasses on her nose and a cigarette between her lips, surveyed him critically, and turned instantly to his former ward.

"Well, Lynneth!" he exclaimed.

Words, it was evident, were inadequate to express his feelings. His tone must endeavour to convey them.

"Well?"

The girl's reply was entirely noncommittal; neutral, rather than defensive. Hearing it, Joan's muscles relaxed and her eyes lost their look of anxiety. Throughout their still brief period of association, she had remained doubtful of Lynneth's basic strength. Now she had no more fears. Lynneth's was that rarest sort of power—the power to refrain from speech, and to wait.

"What have you to say for yourself?" Mr. Hetherington demanded. The phrase might have been truculent; it was almost an appeal.

Lynneth softened instantly. "Only what I've said before—that I'm sorry things happened as they did, and I'll never forget your kindness. Don't go, Joan," she added.

Joan's long limbs slumped into a chair. She very much

wanted to see the scene played out, and her quizzical eyes were bright with interest.

"We're sorry, too, your—your Aunt Honoria and I. We've talked it over, and decided that perhaps there wasn't—er—sufficient allowance made for your youth and inexperience. We——. In short, I've come to take you back to Washington Square."

"It's very kind of you, but——"

"We'll say no more about that unfortunate affair, Lyn-neth, or about Miss De Witt. The less such unpleasant things are discussed, the better. And I'm sure it was entirely the fault of Major Tressel——"

Lynneth interrupted him instantly. "I won't have Major Tressel blamed. What he did was done for— for me. I don't intend to listen to a word——"

"Well, well, we won't say anything more. Perhaps after you've been back a while——"

Lynneth lifted a protesting hand. "You're very generous; but I'm not coming back."

"You're not coming! You'd rather stay—*here?*"

For all his surprise, he did not realize half of what the choice implied. Before Lynneth's eyes two pictures sprang; her bare little room up under the roof of the shabby house on Livingston Place; the dainty, chintz-hung bed-chamber which had been hers in the Hetheringtons' home on Washington Square. And for a moment she was tempted——. It was soft and warm, luxurious and safe and very effortless, the existence now offered her. Yet how could she accept it?

All her future hung in the balance, and she knew it. All her future, to be decided in a breath. . . .

Her hesitancy was only for an instant. Joan had perceived it; not so Mr. Hetherington.

"Yes," she said quietly. "Yes, I'd rather stay here."

Mr. Hetherington's mind was too self-righteous to be entirely clean. He had been quite sure that Lynneth would jump at the chance of returning to Washington

Square. The one credible reason he could see for her refusal gave him moral shudders.

"I'm amazed at you, Lynneth," he said severely, very conscious of the moral shudders—so thoroughly conscious of them that he could easily disregard a concomitant sense of relief. He had done and was doing his duty as he saw it. "I'm very much amazed! I don't intend to argue the matter. Once and for all, are you or are you not coming back with me to Washington Square? Remember, you've got to decide permanently. Yes, or no?"

Again, and for a bare flash of time, Lynneth hesitated. The choice lay clear before her. Safety, ease—with a sense of opprobrium attached; or else, risk—and clean air. "Don't be afraid of experience. It's the empty life that is the unhappy life." Ashby Lawrence's words leaped into her thoughts. But there was more than fear; there was dishonour. She could not buy luxury at the price she must pay should she return to Washington Square—and Valerie.

She lifted her head, and her gravely enquiring eyes met Mr. Hetherington's pale ones.

"No," she said. And there was neither faltering nor any sign of dismay in voice or eyes. "No; I can't come with you. It isn't possible. I'm sorry, but—it isn't possible."

He bowed to Joan, took up his hat, and left the little shop without another word. He was a good man, and he felt that he had scrupulously fulfilled his duty.

He went home, and solemnly warned his wife and daughter to have nothing to do with the girl who wilfully insisted upon going her own way; a way, he was sure, which departed far from the path of rectitude. For to his mind, a wish for liberty on the part of girl or woman could mean only a desire for license. He was a *very* good man.

But among Joan's thoughts the interview had placed an insistent question; "What about Major Tressel?"



## CHAPTER FOURTH

It must be admitted that there were moments during the following year when Lynneth wished it might have been possible for her to decide differently. When her back and eyes ached from long hours spent over the typewriter or wrestling with accounts; when the stifling nights came, and she tossed feverishly on the creaking bed in the little room under the tin roof, while a basin and pitcher seemed a more than usually inadequate substitute for a porcelain tub; when she rose early on dark winter mornings to hurry through a scamped breakfast and hasten up dreary streets to the office behind the shop where the electric lights burned, she longed for the cushioned luxury of the house on North Washington Square. Moreover, she had been genuinely fond of Mrs. Hetherington, and it was a hardship never to see her.

In a couple of very stiff legal communications, Mr. Hetherington had made his accounting as Lynneth's guardian, turning over to her, now that she was of age, the bundles of worthless stocks, as well as the gilt-edged bonds in which he had invested her capital of four thousand dollars. And to his credit be it said, he so manipulated the figures as to make Lynneth believe he had deducted the money spent on her while she was in his house, though he really turned her small inheritance over to her intact. Having thus formally washed his hands of her and her affairs, he let it be understood that their relations were at an end.

As the months slipped away and the life of North Washington Square retreated further and further into the background, it began to seem, not unreal precisely, but like something belonging to another existence. Yet

not altogether; for once, in the early twilight of a winter afternoon, she caught sight of Valerie coming out of an obscure little restaurant near Irving Place. Valerie did not see her; she had turned to speak to the man behind her—Phil Armytage.

And Lynneth was more than glad she had not gone back to the stately house on the North Side of Washington Square.

On the whole, she was happy as well as busy, though she still had to count every penny. Little by little, she had transformed her room. No one would have recognized it now for the cheerless place she had entered less than a year ago. With a step-ladder and some small assistance from the much-amused Joan, she had herself repapered the walls in a soft shade of grey, and given the woodwork a fresh if slightly uneven coat of white paint. She had made muslin curtains for the windows, a pretty chintz cover for the chest of drawers. Books, and some Japanese lilies growing in a dark green, pebble-filled bowl, gave the finishing touches to her little domain.

Her energy and enthusiasm won, first a grudging, then a warm approval from Mrs. Wiggins, her landlady, who actually went so far as to remove a comfortable, if decidedly shabby easy chair from the all but sacred first floor front, and add it to the room's scanty furnishings. Lynneth promptly and deftly re-upholstered it, and as Mrs. Wiggins reluctantly admitted; "Nobody'd a-believed it could a-looked so well!"

Her friendship with Joan, the congeniality of tastes and instincts and reserves which made their companionship as easy as it was unsentimental, was an excellent thing for Lynneth, checking her tendency to over-idealize those she loved. Brusque, matter-of-fact Joan refused to be idealized, and had a way of abruptly jerking the more romantic Lynneth back to earth, occasionally bumping and even bruising her in the process, secretly hoping thereby to lessen her sensitiveness. The two worked

smoothly together, and the business prospered, though the first of every month, when the rent had to be paid, was still a dreaded time.

There was little leisure for play, but Joan often took Lynneth to the Associated Arts Club, an organization of women writers, painters and craft-workers, then occupying an old-fashioned house just east of Irving Place—a veritable haven for the hard-working women among whom Lynneth soon made many acquaintances. It was here that Joan, whose lazy bearing cloaked a vast amount of energy, first put forward her pet coöperative scheme.

This was the projected leasing and doing over of an old-fashioned, elevatorless apartment-house by a little group of people who could trust one another to eschew those things which make the average low-priced flat a purgatory to the well-bred poor—dirt, with its attendant vermin, execrable songs shrieked out hour after hour by third-rate talking machines, an all-pervading smell of grease, onions and boiling cabbage, the screaming of shrill-voiced women at their own and one another's unruly offspring, plus the interminable racket of the afore-said offspring. It so chanced that the real-estate development company of which Danvers Calhoun was a member, steadily expanding its interests, had lately added that of the coöperative apartment, and to it the committee appealed for estimates and advice. Calhoun himself took the matter in hand.

He had visited the bookshop often, but intermittently, partly because his own affairs absorbed him, partly because he had been out of town a good deal. And he couldn't make up his mind. He wanted Lynneth; but did he want her enough, now when she had so evidently broken with the Hetheringtons? As the apartment-house plan advanced, he caught himself using it as an excuse for seeing her; and then suddenly realized that she was avoiding him.

Joan saw something of all this, and believed she under-



stood a good deal more than she actually did. It was the added weight of other reasons, however, which urged her to ask bluntly, one Saturday evening when they were having dinner together in a certain quaint little tearoom on West Twenty-eighth Street:

"See here, Lynn; why wouldn't you go to the theatre with Mr. Calhoun tonight?"

Lynneth hesitated. "I didn't—exactly—want to."

"He's been around a good deal. Seems a pretty decent sort."

"I don't know much about men," Lynneth replied, slowly stirring the sugar in her tiny coffee cup. Even to Joan she would not have admitted how carefully she studied the army orders in the newspapers. Even to herself she did not admit that she was waiting. . . .

"Who does? They don't know such a lot about each other!" Joan ground her cigarette butt on her saucer, and rose with a little yawn. "As for Mr. Calhoun, I wish he'd get a move on the dead-and-alive Trust Company that has charge of the old house! Come home with me and I'll show you the revised plans."

Lynneth assented eagerly. The home-making instinct which had changed the dreary little room under the roof into one whose attractiveness even the pessimistic landlady acknowledged made her revel in this apartment-house project. Not that she expected to share in it. Her interest was completely vicarious; but she delighted to pore over the plans.

Yet when they reached Joan's sitting room, which had an air of being cleared for action, so devoid was it of all but the strictly utilitarian, the older woman did not produce a single blue-print. She only dropped into a well-worn arm chair and lay there staring at the pot of white hyacinths on a low table by the window from which, looking at an angle, one could see the trees in Gramercy Park. Except the flower, there was not an article in the room which wasn't all too obviously useful and in use. The

few magazines and many books, the stalwart table and the lamps whose green shades were as plain as those in any office, were there for service; nothing else.

Suddenly she turned to Lynneth, and all but demanded; "What are you going to do about Mr. Calhoun?"

Had any one else asked it, Lynneth would have resented the question; but it was Joan who spoke. She answered; "Do? Nothing."

"Don't you—like him?"

Lynneth nodded. "I like him very much," she said. "I like him very much—but not enough."

Joan pushed her chair out of the circle of light cast by the reading lamp. Her right hand quickly covered her mouth. Lynneth had become familiar with that gesture during the last few weeks.

After a pause; "Sure you're not laying too much stress on the 'enough'?" Joan asked thoughtfully.

"Is that possible? Oughtn't it to be the biggest thing——? Is it honest or decent to put up with anything less?"

"You're a dyed-in-the-wool romantic, Lynn! Life's not ideals and romance. It's compromise and tolerance."

Lynneth seized the chance to escape the personal.

"You're not usually so enthusiastic about tolerance, Joan!"

Joan thrust up her lower lip. "All right if it isn't overdone! But we've had the virtue of looking at things from the other fellow's point of view hammered into us till we're almost ashamed to have a point of view of our own. National mania, that's what it is, and it's playing hob with our moral backbone. Awfully easy to sneer at the Puritans, but you've got to hand it to them for being strong enough to have definite ideas of right and wrong and not go sloshing about in a mental fog! Nice mixture of metaphors for you!" Then, again suddenly changing her tone, she added seriously; "Every human being needs a code to live by. It's one of the biggest difficulties we

moderns have to face, trying to find reasons for what we instinctively feel are necessary standards of right and wrong. We don't want to go back to the old 'Thou shalt nots'—too much fear in them. But what are we to put in their place?"

"You're right," Lynneth agreed. "We've got to find a new working code. Now it's all restlessness and uncertainty and indecision."

Suddenly Joan rose, snapped off the lights, drew up the blinds and pushed aside the curtains. The pale, faintly silvered light of the spring moon stole softly in, laying a broad bright path across the centre of the room, beyond which on either side were shadows dense as smoke. Joan crouched in one corner of the cushioned window seat, long legs drawn up, arms clasping her knees, her face just outside the path of silvery light.

There was a long pause, a pause during which it seemed as if intangible forces were slowly gathering, as electricity seems to gather in the air before a storm. Then out of the darkness Joan spoke:

"What do you want to do with your life, Lynn? What do you want it to give you? Do you know?"

Something in Joan's tone, something in the atmosphere her mood shed about them both, indescribable yet powerful, made her question not merely serious, but compelling. And Lynneth, sensitive always to any current of emotion, took it as it was meant, not attempting subterfuge or evasion.

"Yes; I do know." A moment more, and she went on; "I'm old-fashioned, I suppose. I never dreamed much about becoming famous, and having a great career, and all that sort of thing. I've liked working with you, and I like the business. But I've had a year of it now, and I wouldn't want to go on with it, always. I'd like to be taken care of. I'm tired of taking care of myself, and being independent and all the rest of it! I want to take



care of some one else. I don't want to be independent! I want——" She caught her breath, and was silent.

Again Joan spoke, out of the darkness. "Independence and freedom are good, but—they're lonely."

"Horribly lonely! I'm not like you and some of those Associated Arts women, Joan; I'm not sufficient to myself. I want"—the words came rushing now, as they had come during those hours of the night when she challenged her personality, asking what she could and ought to make of herself, her few short years of mortal life—"I want a home of my own, and love, and—children."

Another silence. And to each woman it seemed as if a Presence had entered the room, and stood there in the shadows close beside her. And Lynneth's heart rose exultant, and cried out a name and a greeting. For the Presence she saw was one of youth and vigour and splendid promise. And Joan's heart grew heavy with dread, and a coldness like the breath of a glacier chilled her blood. For the Presence she saw was one whose coming meant denial, and darkness, and frustration.

Then in spite of her own dreaded doom of the spreading shadow and the icy cold, Joan gave of what she had. And if the value of a gift be measured by its cost to the giver, that which she bestowed was precious indeed.

"You've one great advantage, Lynn," she said slowly, her broad capable hands tightening their clasp about her knees. "You've one very great advantage; you understand yourself. You know you're neither a genius nor a born celibate. You need marriage, not so much to make you happy, as to bring out the best that's in you. All women aren't like that. There are some who must and should live out their lives alone, and some who can do it if they have to, and get along well enough. But all women worth a brass farthing are *creators*. They've got to make something, bring forth something, or their very souls shrivel and dry up. It may be a book or a garden

or a picture, a tea room or a child. Mistake most people make is fancying that for all women the something must be children."

"For me, it is," replied Lynneth softly.

"Yes. Oh, I've watched you, Lynn! You've a great big talent for loving, and believing the best of those you love. Don't think you're conscious of it, but you expect a lot of them! Whether Danvers Calhoun can measure up to you and what you need, I don't know. Only, there's this about it; he loves you. It may not be a—well, a *grande passion*. Such love's a good bit rarer in real life, I fancy, than it is in romances and poetry! But since he's nothing to gain by it, it must be sincere." She paused again. "Don't put that love aside, Lynn, unless you're very sure! Love isn't offered every day. It may mean your best chance to make your life what you want it to be; even your one big chance."

"I've thought of that, lately. I like him and I might even—come to care—in a way, perhaps. But it doesn't—it isn't——" She broke off there and added, wistfully and with a perfect simplicity; "How does one get to be quite sure of—of that, Joan? Is it——"

Again she broke off. She did not so much think as become penetrated, through and through, with the memory of an hour of instinctive confidence, instinctive reliance and understanding. The knightly shadow-shape was very near, was oddly and inextricably herself, a part of herself. . . .

For an instant Joan's hand covered her mouth in that gesture which had become habitual. Her husky voice sounded odd, curiously stifled; "I don't know. I've never—never been in love with any one."

"And you were always perfectly sure you were best off as you were? You didn't doubt or hesitate?"

Another pause; the reply came harshly; "I never had the chance to doubt! No one ever was in love with me."

Lynneth bit her lip; and was silent.

"It is queer—unnatural almost, isn't it?" Joan went on in the same harsh tone, reading Lynneth's thoughts with all but uncanny clearness. "I suppose *I* must be queer, and—unnatural, somehow. I'm not so bad-looking, and I've lots of friends, but—There's something wrong with me, something—lacking, perhaps! Oh, I don't suppose I'm unique, but if I do belong to a class, a type, it's one you almost never hear or read about. We're the—unwanted. And our pride makes us try to hide it, just as we'd try to hide any other sort of deformity. And when the everlasting reiteration of the one theme in every story we read and every play we see taunts us and makes us feel like lepers, we pretend it doesn't, and smile, and make believe we're like other women, and deceive each other, and pass each other by, and do our best never to let any one suspect we belong to the grey sisterhood——"

"Joan!"

"I don't know why I'm giving myself away like this! I suppose we all have to talk to somebody, sometime. I don't want you to feel sorry for me! There are compensations, lots of them. We escape any amount of agony, we outsiders! And I've had a good deal out of life. I like my work, and I'm one of the women who can—who can stand alone if they have to. But you—you're different. You haven't any business or professional or artistic talent, and you need affection as much as—as that plant there does water! At first I was just a little afraid you might be—one of us. And if you've nothing else, if you've never had anything else, it must be hard to die without ever having been—wanted."

Lynneth could find no words. Something of what it must have cost Joan to strip away the covering from this bitter secret of hers, her own pride enabled her to divine. The secret, whose very negativeness put it beyond the reach of sympathy! What could be said, what comfort offered, that would not seem facile, cheap, almost an insult?



The long lane of silvery light was shifting, shifting. Over that part of the window seat where Joan sat, the shadows were stealthily encroaching. A little more, and she would be entirely in darkness, untouched by even the outermost edge of all the splendour.

It was Joan herself who ended the long silence, quietly, with a complete change of subject.

"Did I tell you Madge was going away in June? She needs a vacation badly."

"So do you! You haven't been looking any too fit lately."

"Oh, I'll carry on all right over this summer, anyway. Afterwards, perhaps I'll take a rest—a good long rest."

It was so dark now that Lynneth could not see the queer little smile hovering on Joan's thin lips.

## CHAPTER FIFTH

IGNORANT though she was of the hesitations and recoils which had so complicated matters for Calhoun, Joan was right in her summing up. He was in love, and disinterestedly in love with Lynneth—to his own surprise and no small mortification.

He had done his best to cure himself of his folly. Elected to the Legislature the preceding November, he had made his duties in Albany an excuse for long absences from New York; but what good did these do, when on his return his rebellious feet took him straight to the little bookshop? He was deeply impressed by his own opportunities and importance; he presently discovered that other people were not, thereby proving himself of more than average intelligence.

But Lynneth was an excellent listener. He could take her to dinner and talk about himself for hours, without her ever once trying to interpose with talk about herself. Wherefore he thoroughly enjoyed her society. And there were many times when he couldn't get it.

During the first weeks after her departure from Washington Square, Lynneth had scarcely thought of Calhoun. He had never won any hold on her imagination, and the incidents of that last evening she put aside. She had been over-excited, and he, no doubt, said more than he meant. But she liked him, and being interested in watching almost all sorts of wheels go round, found the political difficulties he described especially intriguing. Then when in January Ashby Lawrence sailed for Italy in search of additions to his collection, Calhoun became the principal link between Washington Square and her present existence, could tell her what was happening in that social world out of which she had stepped.

He it was who described to her how Lisa was horrifying the whole Hetherington connection by the extraordinary people she entertained at her apartment on Park Avenue. The latest ouija-board operator, the soon-to-be-deported anarchist, the soviet envoy, the dabbler in psychoanalysis, the sensation mongers of all kinds and both sexes were always welcome in her drawing-room, to which society went much as it might have gone to a menagerie or a circus.

Then came the apartment-house project to throw them yet more frequently together.

About this time, Lynneth took alarm, and began consistently to refuse Calhoun's invitations. Her intentions were of the best, but had she been looking for one, she could not have found a more efficacious method of arousing his obstinacy and increasing his ardour. The thing refused was the thing he wanted. And her denials only made the game more interesting, gave spice to the ultimate victory of which he had never a doubt.

Early in May, the long-drawn-out negotiations over the leasing of the building on Stuyvesant Park to the coöperative association were concluded. These difficulties ended, a whole crop of new ones sprang up and grew like weeds. Not one of the group but had definite ideas as to what ought to be done about the house in general and her own apartment in particular—ideas expressed at great length and with astonishing fluency. And as no two entirely agreed, there wasn't any majority.

"Whe-ew!" Calhoun ejaculated one evening, as Lynneth and he were coming from a meeting in the rooms of the Associated Arts Club. "I feel as if my head would burst! Let's stroll round the park a while. I haven't had a chance to talk to you for weeks, and it isn't late."

"Joan—Miss Hilary will have her way in the end, see if she doesn't," Lynneth replied confidently, ignoring his last sentence.



"I thought so too, at first. But now the husbands have come into it so strenuously——!"

They had reached the corner of Irving Place, and he turned definitely to the right. If she wanted to decline the little walk he had suggested, she must make a point of it.

"Why has Mr. Grant such an abounding passion for units, do you suppose?" asked Lynneth lightly. She knew that if she vetoed his suggestion he would argue about it, and so increase its importance, minimized by a tacit acquiescence. It would not be the first time they had strolled around Gramercy Park before he took her home. "He orates away about units of light and units of space and units of heat and units of expense and units of goodness only knows what else! I don't believe he knows what he's talking about half the time—and I'm sure the rest of us don't!"

They had come now to the little park at the upper end of Irving Place. The evening was just pleasantly warm. A fitful breeze rustled the young leaves daintily. From the small green square stole night-scents of flowers and shrubs and crushed grasses, the subtly delicious fragrance only darkness seems able to coax forth. Here and there a tiny fleecy cloud drifted leisurely across the sky, snow-white against the deep clear blue. The slender crescent moon hung poised with an almost self-conscious picturesqueness above and a little to one side of the Metropolitan Tower, dominating even that glare of arc lamps below which made all but a very few of the stars invisible. It is one of the deplorable things about city life, that it must for the most part be lived without the stars.

Lynneth's beauty-loving spirit absorbed it all with a keenness of delight which, for once, she felt no impulse to share with her companion. She wondered whether the moon looked just the same in California as it did in New York? Her faithful scrutiny of the army orders

printed in the newspapers had been rewarded that morning by the sight of Geoffrey Tressel's name.

"Well, he has to do something to convince people he isn't merely Mrs. Grant's husband!" Calhoun was saying. "He's not as accommodating as Armytage! Phil just tags along after his wife and doesn't seem to mind at all."

Lynneth bit her lip. Twice again that winter she had seen Valerie and Phil together, both times in the neighbourhood of the obscure little restaurant. . . .

Calhoun went on; "It isn't as if he cared a great deal about her, either. If he did——"

"It must be rather horrid to go through life as the tail to some other person's kite!" Lynneth exclaimed hastily, and a little breathlessly. She had suddenly sensed what was coming; and she had an almost panicky wish to avoid it.

"I wouldn't mind—I'd like it—if it was *your* kite!"

"Oh, don't! *Please* don't!" Lynneth's protest responded to his tone more than to his words. "I wish you wouldn't!"

It wasn't a particularly encouraging beginning. He persisted stubbornly.

"I must. I can't help it. You know I love you!"

She had done her best to stop him; but she liked him, and being only human she wasn't impervious to the flattery of his avowal. Her all but cloistered early life had excluded suitors, and Joan's friends were mostly women. Calhoun was the first man to pay her the supreme compliment, and though she wasn't in love with him, there was an undeniable thrill in hearing him declare himself in love with her.

"I want to marry you, darling, and get you out of that wretched little shop! I'm not as rich yet as I will be some day, but I can give you a good deal. And you know my ambitions! I believe I'm going far, and I want to take you with me."

The confident egotism of that declaration, its recurrent

"I," its insistence on the material advantages it offered, jarred on Lynneth. She didn't stop to analyze it, but she tried to draw away the hand he had seized and when he refused to release it paused sharply, turning and facing him, her pride of virgin freedom fiercely resenting even this faint foreshadowing of captivity.

"Let go!" she exclaimed in sudden anger.

Surprise loosened his clasp, and she wrenched her hand away—repenting her harshness the instant she was again at liberty. She didn't want to hurt him! Remorsefully she looked up, straining to see his face through the soft darkness. It would be dreadful to make him suffer as men did in plays and poems!

"I didn't mean to hurt you," she said tentatively. "I wish——"

He had the good sense not to try to recover her hand.

"Won't you think it over, Lynneth?" he pleaded. "You're all alone—you haven't a very great deal to look forward to! I can give you a home, and lots of pretty things, and—and you do like me a little, don't you? It seems as if you must, when I love you so much!"

"I do like you," Lynneth replied instantly, compunction mingling with her promptness. "I like you very well indeed, but . . ."

"Isn't that enough?"

"No. There's too much risk——"

"I'll take the risk!"

She shook her head; he went on obstinately:

"I won't give you up! I'll be patient and wait, if—You're not engaged to any one else?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Then give me a chance! Let me keep on seeing you. I won't bother you, I won't say a word—be kind to me, darling!"

So he pleaded, heaping promises and protestations on one another. She might change her mind. Women often did! He couldn't and wouldn't accept her "No"



as a final answer. He knew the time would come when she'd turn it into "Yes!"

Lynneth listened more and more unwillingly, her candid brow wrinkling in naïve but very genuine perplexity. Was she indeed sure? Was she perhaps discarding the substance for the sake of a radiant shadow? Worse still, was she shrinking from responsibility and experience? "It's the empty life that is the unhappy life!"

A cloud obscured the moon; the faint breeze died away. A summer shower was coming up, but in the glare of the arc-lights the warning dimness was not noticeable.

Lynneth spoke slowly, with a reluctance she did not fully understand. They were facing southward again. Behind them the tower lifted its brilliantly crowned head toward the stars; before them the garish glitter of Fourteenth Street winked and blazed.

"I'm afraid of making you only more unhappy," she said doubtfully.

"You will, if you don't let me see you often, and try——"

"It doesn't seem fair to you. The risk's all yours."

In his heart he didn't believe there was any risk. An irritating delay, certainly. But ultimate failure—oh, impossible!

"Rubbish!" he almost laughed. "I'd be a pretty poor sort of lover if I wasn't ready to risk my immortal soul for such a chance!"

Somehow, that last phrase didn't ring true. Yet excitement was tingling in Lynneth's nerves. Pity, generosity, flattered vanity, the sheer delight of being loved urged her on to be, as he had said, kind to him. And she vaguely wondered whether this could really be the beginning, the first thrill heralding the coming of that of which she had so often dimly dreamed? It didn't seem possible, and yet——

Just then, with a soft, reproachful little hiss, the big drops came down.

## CHAPTER SIXTH

So by one of those minor ironies which swarm in life like germs in water, the first result of Lynneth's first proposal was a pair of soaking wet feet and a heavy cold which developed into a mild attack of bronchitis. While it lasted, Calhoun kept her room full of flowers; but just as she was getting well he was obliged to start on a business trip which took him as far as Denver.

The illness pulled her down. She came out of it pale and thin, and when in June the first heat wave struck the city, only force of will kept her from a collapse. Meantime, the renovating of the old apartment-house was well under way, and she spent some joyful hours choosing tints and wall-papers, a task in which she delighted, while to Joan it would have been merely a bore.

They had had no more intimate talk on the subject of Danvers Calhoun. But that Joan had drawn her own conclusions was evident when she announced in her most matter-of-fact manner: "You know, Lynn, you're coming with me when I move. I've five rooms. That'll give us a bedroom and sitting room apiece, so we won't be in each other's way. Only have to share the bath and kitchen."

"But, good gracious, Joan, I can't possibly afford——"

"Pay what you're paying now, if that'll make your mind any easier! I may—may have to go away for a bit next winter. Business, of course. Got some books and stuff in storage, haven't you? Better dig 'em out. Then you're going to the country to get a rest."

"I'm not going to do anything of the kind!" Lynneth protested vigorously. "I'm quite all right!"

And it was only when Dr. Macneven tersely informed her that she could choose between a vacation now and a

sanitarium in the near future, that she agreed to go away. Two questions instantly arose: Where to go, and how to pay for going?

Ashby Lawrence had returned to New York during Lynneth's convalescence. Joan, a wrinkle between her straight broad brows, explained the situation to him one evening when he dropped in to see her.

"Lynn won't take tuppence from me," she went on. "Fact is, I'm a bit hard up myself just now. But I don't want her to dip into her four thousand."

"She hasn't anything else?"

"Only a bunch of stock not worth the paper it's printed on!"

"Some of it might be. Ask her to let me look at it, will you?"

Joan's hazel eyes lost their quizzical expression as they met his. The two were old friends, and sometimes understood each other very well.

"You're a mighty good sort, Ash!" she said quietly.

A few days later he wrote that his broker had sold for twenty-five cents a share some oil stock for which the late Paul Frear had paid fifty-five dollars. He brought the certified cheque to the shop one afternoon, and found Lynneth and Joan discussing the demerits of various country boarding houses.

"There's a place Mrs. Grant used to go to," Lynneth said, after thanking him warmly. "A house at Oakside, in the Catskills. She says it's quiet and comfortable, but the prices have gone up to more than I ought to pay—even now," she added, smiling at Lawrence.

He paused, thinking of the letter he had received that morning:

"I'll stay up here at West Hillsdale until I've put my notes in order and written my report for the Government. If you want a change, why not try this place for a while? I'm still at the Thornes'—the dear old things wouldn't hear of my going anywhere else—but there's a mighty decent



boarding house not far off, and it would do your sybaritic soul good to live at the rate of fourteen dollars a week!"

By the time he had offered Joan his case and taken a cigarette for himself, Lawrence had made up his mind.

"I've heard of a place that seems the very thing," he began, striking a match. "West Hillsdale, they call it; cool, comfortable, and only fourteen dollars a week."

"Sounds promising," commented Joan. "Go on!"

Lawrence went on. For as he told himself with a shrug and a smile after the decision had been made, West Hillsdale air would certainly do Lynneth good! Of that, there couldn't be the smallest doubt.

As the apartment-house would be ready when she returned to town, Lynneth packed her belongings and gave up the little room on Livingston Place which had been her home for over a year, thereby greatly distressing the pessimistic landlady, who darkly prophesied that she'd be wishing herself back again before long.

"Mark my words, Miss Frear," she averred in Cassandra-like tones, "mark my words, such schemes as them don't never work! The good Lord ain't meant women to live together. They're born to quarrelin' as the sparks flies up'ards. I'm a-goin' to have them curtains you made all done up nice, an' when you want to come back, Miss Frear, just you let me know, an' I'll get them that's in the room out of it, an' you'll find it all fixed up for you as good as ever!"

Lynneth's impulse was to hug her, but hugging Mrs. Wiggins was like getting a seat in the subway during the rush hour—one of those things that simply couldn't be done. She had to swallow hard, though, before she replied. She had grown fond of the place, attached to it by all those little threads of use and familiarity which can only be broken at the cost of a pang, no matter what the reason for severing them may be.

Yet she had often felt very lonely, and she looked for-

ward to the time when she would join her friend in their new home. Her brain teemed with plans for making it the cosiest and most comfortable place in New York. Even Joan should love it, whose idea of home was a roof over her head and something to sleep on! It was Stuyvesant Park that mattered, Stuyvesant Park for which she was impatiently waiting. West Hillsdale was merely an interlude.

BOOK III  
WEST HILLSDALE





# BOOK III

## WEST HILLSDALE

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### CHAPTER FIRST

AT four o'clock the sun was still hot on the unshaded portions of the road which wound like a thick white cord up what the frequenters of West Hillsdale always referred to as "The Mountain," and Lynneth was glad to make use of the lavender-flowered sunshade she had purchased in a mood of reckless extravagance. She didn't intend to go far. The journey of the previous day, not very long in actual distance, but tedious with much waiting for trains and at the end a ten-mile drive, mostly up-hill, behind a pair of sturdy farm-horses, had tired her more than a little. And though in obedience to the doctor's orders she had breakfasted in her room, the subsequent unpacking had proved a wearisome and back-breaking business. Restlessness, however, had presently sent her from the house, combined with a desire to get away from the dozen-odd of elderly women who rocked and did fancy-work and gossiped, seldom moving off the veranda. The road, winding forward invitingly, was a summons to adventure.

The thought made her smile. Adventure—with the stray cow of whose possible presence she had been solemnly warned? Lynneth wasn't in the least afraid of cows, but she had listened sedately while fat old Mrs. Rankin declared; "You must be very careful, my dear, very careful. It's a positive disgrace, the way that ani-

mal is allowed to go wandering around! Somebody ought to speak to Mr. Thorne!"

She sauntered along, often pausing to give leisurely appreciation to the charm of the green countryside, lying hushed and drowsy in the slumbrous stillness of the summer afternoon. On her right the ground fell sharply away to the thickly wooded valley far beneath, whose closely clustering tree-tops looked almost like a meadow in the distance. Just across, on the opposite side of the declivity, rose that other mountain near whose summit was a famous sanitarium. To her left, evergreens sloped gradually upward, the earth beneath them brown and soft with layer upon layer of pine needles whose fragrance gave an added pungence to the clean bright air.

Passing the pine grove, the road plunged, breathlessly, straight into a small wood, through which a tiny brook danced gayly, babbling to itself in cheeriest fashion as it skipped over smooth brown stones or slid between green sedges and under the overhanging branches of the peering trees. Lynneth loved that little brook from the moment she first caught sight of it, so happy was it, so irresistibly mirthful in the way it chuckled over the secrets whispered to it by the trees and grasses. Leaning against a boulder by the roadside she stood watching it as it wreathed its undaunted way about the obstacles it was not strong enough to surmount, sparkling back at every stray shaft of sunlight which reached it through the closely drawn guard of the jealous leaves. Very little of sunshine did it ever get, this small brave brook, but it made the most of that little.

Lynneth glanced about, looking for a place to sit. But the mossy ground beneath the trees was soaking wet, and the boulder against which she had been leaning held a pool of rain-water in the hollow on top. A little further along, however, just beyond the wood, a tumble-down shack stood a few feet back from the road in the midst of a tangle of vines and bushes, grown over



what must once have been a small clearing. Towards this she turned. The cabin had long since been abandoned, but the flat stone which had done duty as a doorstep was still in place, dry and warm from the sunshine that had streamed down upon it all morning, but sheltered now by the shadow of the decrepit structure.

It seemed ideal and Lynneth congratulated herself upon her "find"—congratulated herself the more because she had Blackwood's "The Lost Valley" tucked under her arm. Quickly and deftly arranging her short white linen skirt, she settled herself to enjoyment. The rustling of the leaves, the cheery murmur of the hidden brook, the faint, scarcely audible buzz and hum of innumerable, invisible insects, made an harmonious accompaniment to the strange and beautiful story.

"I beg your pardon!"

Lynneth jumped, so startled by the sudden interruption that she dropped her book face downwards on the grass. A tall young man, bareheaded and deeply tanned, stood by the edge of the road, directly facing her.

"I beg your pardon!" he repeated, starting forward to pick up the fallen book. And then—"Why, Miss Frear!"

"Major Tressel!"

He took the intervening space in a couple of strides, and they shook hands warmly. Intuitively, each knew that the other was thinking of their former meeting, so brief and so eventful. Yet for the moment, both ignored it.

Stooping to recover the ill-treated volume, Tressel smoothed out its crumpled pages with the instinctive care of the genuine book-lover as he went on; "To think of finding you here! What luck! I hope I didn't scare you? That old shanty is simply chockful of wasps, and I knew you'd be stung sure as Fate if you stayed there long." The grey-blue eyes twinkled suddenly, and a smile twitched the corners of the straight, strong mouth.

"I was, first day I got here. The plaguey things are so pestiferously affectionate!"

The warm colour had risen in Lynneth's cheeks; clear gladness shone in her frank eyes.

"So if it hadn't been for the wasps—!" she laughed, a little breathlessly.

"If it hadn't been for the wasps, I might have passed you by! Couldn't see you well—too much sun in my eyes. The good Samaritan act certainly was rewarded that time! But to think of our meeting—here!"

She understood perfectly all that last phrase suggested, rather than expressed. Could a greater contrast exist than that between the feverish atmosphere which had surrounded them once, and the exquisite peace of this sun-drenched afternoon? Their surroundings were different, quite different; but they themselves, and that which they both felt and of which they were both conscious, were changed only in some small degree. The sense of complete and welcoming recognition they had had then was theirs now; a recognition beyond the mere customary one of face and form.

All this was in her consciousness, more than in her thought. And her reply was entirely commonplace, entirely matter-of-fact.

"I'm staying at the boarding house—Jenkins', they call it—a little way down the road."

"Oh, yes, I know! I'm at the Thornes', farther up the mountain. Their son Jim was a pal of mine. We were together on the Somme, and at Ypres. Jim went over in 1915, with the Canadians."

Without a suggestion from either, they had begun to move slowly up the road, side by side. The light shining through her sunshade made a faint nimbus around the girl's head.

"I only came last night," Lynneth said, "and of course I don't know much about the people here, but down at the house they told me that a lot of the young men who

went away stayed away—they weren't willing to go back to farming. How does your friend feel about it?"

Tressel switched at some roadside weeds with the iron-tipped walking stick he carried.

"Jim never did come back. He went West—in Flanders. That was what brought me here the first time—last summer. I've been traveling around ever since, studying up the airplane situation. Now I'm getting a report ready for the Government. I wanted a quiet place to work in, and the Thornes wanted me with them." With an abrupt, yet deliberate change of tone, he added lightly; "You see, I'm killing two birds with one stone."

Instantly she changed her key to accord with his.

"Hadn't you better make it wasps?"

He turned and smiled at her—that quick disarming smile of his, which was so much more of the eyes than of the lips.

"'Twouldn't be fair! I owe the wasps a debt of gratitude!"

"Even the one that stung you?" she asked with a demure little twinkle.

"That one especially! Without personal experience, I'd never have ventured a warning—mightn't even have thought of one. And then you'd have been stung, and I don't believe you'd have liked it!"

"Are you reminding me you've twice been a friend in need? And that's going some, as the boys say, considering this is only the second time we've met!"

"Is it only the second time?"

The exclamation was scarcely voluntary. The words seemed almost to have uttered themselves. . . .

They had paused a moment to look down into the tree-clad valley, where the shadows were lengthening as the afternoon waned. All at once, the song of a bird sprayed the stillness with a shower of crystal notes. They stood listening, then went on again in silence. Tressel's in-



voluntary question had opened a vista both were tacitly agreed not to explore—as yet. They did not precisely ignore it; rather left it there, to be entered at will, whenever they should be ready.

In a sheltered nook a wild-rose bush still bloomed. He picked one of the flowers and offered it to her. She fastened it in her belt with a smile of thanks. . . .

Presently she asked; “Did you go out to the Coast next morning, as you expected?”

The question was a permission.

“Yes. And you—what happened? Did you—succeed?”

“Partly. You see, Valerie——” She stopped. She had been on the point of breaking her promise. “But I can’t tell you. I said I wouldn’t tell any one. Only—it was one of the things that made me go off on my own.”

He looked down at her quickly. “On your own?”

With a few light, quick strokes she sketched the little bookshop, its proprietors and patrons, while he listened appreciatively, once or twice flinging back his head and laughing with an almost boyish abandon. But the laughter was due to an inward exuberance, rather than to anything she had to tell.

As yet the ascent had been gradual, but now the winding road rose sharply before them, steep and stony, with outcropping ledges of solid rock jutting forward at irregular intervals.

Lynneth paused. She wasn’t very strong as yet, and the climb looked formidable. “I’ll have to turn back now. I didn’t mean to go so far, and it must be getting towards supper-time.”

He glanced at his wrist watch. “It’s only a little after half-past five, and you haven’t come far, really. It just seems so because it’s all new to you. But if you’re tired——?”

“I don’t feel tired!” Lynneth’s inflection confessed

her surprise. "It's this wonderful air, I suppose. I've been ill—that's why I'm here. So I've got to be a bit careful."

It was not her habit to talk about herself, much less about her ailments. But to tell him things seemed so completely natural!

He accepted what she chose to tell, without making it an excuse for questions.

"That's too bad! Some other time, though— After you've reached the top of that rise the road goes straight on past some wonderful silver birches, and there's another jolly little brook, and a tiny pond with an old wooden seat under a big tree. Jim Thorne and his brother made it when they were kids. The Thornes' house is down that muddy lane we passed a moment or two ago, and a lot of the land round here belongs to them. You ought to see that brook! There are trout in it, and it's fun to watch them jump."

"I'll take a book up there some day."

"This one?" He glanced again at the title. "I believe it's the only thing of his I haven't read.—Oh, I couldn't think of letting you carry it!" as they reached the muddy road and she put out her hand for the volume. "It's ever so much too heavy for you!"

"Won't you be late for your own supper?"

"Oh well— Do you know, I believe this would be just the right story to read up there? It's a—an unspoiled, out-of-the-world sort of place. Lots of ferns, and wild flowers, and a whole family of chipmunks. You feel as if—well, as if Pan himself might come round the corner any minute!"

"If it's as alluring as all that, I'll have to get up there some day!"

"Some day—soon?" he insisted.

"Yes." She did not know that her voice had sunk a little. Nor did she question her own unadorned sentences. What did words matter? This which was hap-

pening was beyond all power of expression. That her conscious mind did not yet admit it, had no effect upon the truth. "And if Pan objects," she added gayly, "I'll tell him I came to give nuts to the chipmunks. Wouldn't that be a good way to get round him?"

The shadows were long now over the winding road. The sun was disappearing behind the trees, and the west, though faintly flushed, had not yet become a glory of crimson and of gold. But the promise of splendour was surely there. . . .



## CHAPTER SECOND

WHEN Lynneth awoke next morning, it was to the brisk pattering of rain against her window. A curtain of mist, fold on fold, veiled the valley; the road was all dark brown mud and water, the sky a dull, unhappy grey. Was there any hope of its clearing by afternoon, she wondered? If it didn't, she couldn't have her walk. And she didn't want to stay in her room, or sit in the ugly "parlor" with the dozen women who were her fellow-boarders. They were very good and kind, but no one of them seemed ever to have been young, and their endless dissertations upon the servants they had employed and the illnesses they had had, were anything but exhilarating! Apparently the only persons under seventy anywhere in the neighbourhood were herself and Geoffrey Tressel.

She smiled to herself, quite unconsciously, as she put fresh water into the glass holding the now somewhat faded rose he had given her.

Was he thinking of her? Was he too wondering if the rain. . . .

But goodness! She was forgetting the letter to Joan which must be written and sent by the one and only mail, which in this out-of-the-way place came and went with the utmost irregularity—whenever any one happened to be going down to the village where the post office was, ten miles away. She began her letter at once; but innumerable anxious glances at the sky considerably hindered its progress.

Yet the birds took her unawares when, just before noon, they began a hesitant chirping which presently, gathering courage, merged into song. Then a long,

luminous streak cut straight athwart the grey of the west. And gradually the sun himself came smiling through the clouds, and the rain drops still clinging to the leaves began to sparkle, and even the puddles along the road beamed with delight, while hens clucked and wandering cocks crew lustily, as though trying to overwhelm, since they could not rival, the chorus of praise hymned by the birds.

Lynneth's spirits mounted instantly. Joy danced in her eyes, as humming a blithe little tune under her breath she ran downstairs and out on to the veranda for a breath of air before the one o'clock dinner.

But the ground didn't dry as rapidly as she had hoped, and when she came out ready for her walk, armed as before with book and flowered parasol, as well as with the cretonne bag holding the sweater she was knitting for Joan, she paused on the lower step, looking with dismay first at the road and then at her immaculate little white suède ties. The old ladies were all assembled, needles and 'tongues clacking as usual.

"I'm afraid you'll find it very bad walking," remarked Mrs. Rankin, oldest and fattest of them all, in a tone of plaintive accusation. Mrs. Rankin's habitual tone was one of plaintive accusation. If she asked you to pick up her ball of worsted she seemed to imply your personal responsibility for its impish persistency in rolling under her chair.

"Not if you go *up* The Mountain!" exclaimed Mrs. Winters, who made it a point of honour to disagree with Mrs. Rankin. "Going down towards Hillsdale it *may* be wet"—a grudging concession to the obvious!—"but take the other direction, and you'll find it perfectly dry. I'd go with you myself if it wasn't for my rheumatism."

"I did think something of walking part way to Hillsdale, but perhaps I'd better take your advice and go up

The Mountain again," Lynneth replied with a docility which won Mrs. Winters' unqualified approbation.

It was impossible to see for any great distance along the winding road, and she walked slowly, though her feet showed an unaccountable tendency to hurry, and she had to force them to hold to the leisurely pace they had kept so easily the preceding day. Here and there were puddles and patches of mud which had to be avoided, but she met with no real difficulty until the pine grove was passed, and she stood there where the road plunged into the little wood. Then she paused with an involuntary exclamation. At the edge it wasn't so bad, but further forward——! And yet, wouldn't it be possible to get through by picking your way very carefully and walking on the stones from which the rain had washed their usual thin coating of earth? The brook seemed to call her, its voice no longer a murmur, but jubilant, full-throated. And she did want to see it rushing over the pebbles!

In front and on both sides the mud was soft and deep. A large stone, flat on top, projected above the surrounding swamp, but it was a very long step, and she wasn't sure she could reach it, except by jumping. If she only had a good stout walking stick instead of a sunshade! But she must make it somehow, or go back, and go back she wouldn't. Let herself be baffled by a bit of mud? Not if she knew it! She took a long breath and was preparing for the jump when something, some instinct, made her look up quickly. Geoffrey Tressel was coming round the bend of the road.

"Wait a minute!" he called. "Let me give you a hand! One, two, three—— There!"

An instant, and they were both beside the boulder, looking down at the rain-swollen brook.

"You seem fated to come to my rescue!" Lynneth laughed. "They told me it wouldn't be wet up this way—I don't believe one of them has been so far in years!"



"It's only the one bit that's swampy. Further on it's as dry as you please, and the view over the valley's gorgeous. Come and look!"

They went on, past the wasp-infested shack, and forward to where a break in the trees enabled them to look down, far, far down into the valley.

That valley was not green now, but all white and pale grey, an infinite variety of pearl and snow and silver. For the hot sun was turning the moisture held there into mist and vapour, and these came seething up, like steam from some mammoth cauldron. Impossible to see into it through the thick, cirrus clouds of smoky vapour that swirled and eddied, thinning as they rose, melting away as they reached the clear upper air, rain-washed, golden with sunshine. Though a gay little breeze blew with coquettish fitfulness, only a very few touches of feathery white flecked the translucent blue of the summer sky. The fragrance of moist earth and of young growing things, grateful for the shower which had freed them from dust, was fresh and sweet and clean as no other scent ever can be but that of the sea itself. And save for the soft sibilant murmurings of the leaves and the chirp and twitter of the birds, not a sound broke the perfect stillness. An all-submerging sense of quietude and of awe stole over Lynneth, calming her quick-beating pulses, removing all nerve-tension, smoothing out and soothing her too-active, questioning brain. In all her life she had never known such contentment, restfulness exquisite and complete. An ancient phrase formed itself upon her lips; "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding . . ."

Geoffrey's eyes met hers; met and held them a moment. And neither spoke again for a long while.

The steep rise at whose foot Lynneth had paused the day before was ascended in silence. They came presently to the bench beside the pool of which he had told her and there sat down, still without the interchange

of a word. Yet neither had any fear that speech might mar their strange and perfect accord. It was not dangerous; but only—unnecessary.

It came at last, came when an inquisitive chipmunk stole warily out from among the nearby sumach bushes and paused, waiting for Geoffrey to produce the expected handful of nuts.

"How tame he is!" Lynneth exclaimed.

"Isn't he? Mrs. Thorne comes here occasionally, and she's made pets of three or four of these little fellows, but this one seems to regard me as his special property. You ought to hear him scold when I pretend I haven't anything for him!"

Lynneth laughed softly—the faintest ripple of mirth, which did not even alarm the chipmunk. And so they talked on, lightly, easily, unconsciously avoiding anything that might border on seriousness or approach, however obliquely, the depths of which both were aware, as one slowly awakening from profound sleep is aware of the first pale glimmer of the coming daylight.

It was a passing allusion of Geoffrey's to a little stream he had once seen in an Indian forest, supposed to have been one of the resting places of the Buddha, that made Lynneth say, a little wistfully; "You've travelled a good deal, haven't you?"

"Quite a bit. You see, I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth. It was forcibly removed a few years ago, but while it stayed there I had a mighty good time."

"Was it the war that—that did the removing?" Lynneth asked.

"Yes, and no. My father died when I was only a little chap, and my uncle, his elder brother, promised to make me his heir. He was an old bachelor—there were more than fifteen years between him and my father—and he had a pile of money. My mother died before I was out of college, and my uncle was firmly convinced that work was the original curse, and to have to earn

your own living the worst possible misfortune. He collected idols—the more hideous they were the better he liked them—and when I graduated he sent me on a trip around the world. While I was gone he married a widow with five small children! Then the war came, and I wangled my way into the English Army. That was the last straw! I fancy the widow'd have had her knife into me anyway, but she was one of the pro-German, self-styled pacifist bunch, and she twisted my poor old uncle round her little finger. He wrote me a letter that would make your hair stand on end—called me a hired murderer and a few trifles of that sort, and wound up by declaring he never wanted to hear my name again."

"But you were transferred when America went in?"

"Oh yes; they were awfully decent about it. That didn't make a speck of difference to dear uncle, though. He died, and cut me off without even the customary shilling. D'you know," he added whimsically, "I've never been able to understand how such a punctilious old chap as he was came to omit that shilling? It spoils the effect of the whole thing! Cut off without a shilling doesn't sound right. Now does it?"

"You don't seem to worry about it very much!"

"Why should I? My uncle lived in San Francisco, and he didn't even pretend to care tuppence ha'penny for me—I never saw him more than a couple of times." He paused with a chuckle. "I don't believe I made any overwhelmingly favourable impression on him, either! I remember once when I was a little tad about eight or so, he said something that made me furious, and I shied a book at him! Holy cats, wasn't there a row, though? Then when I was in college, I got the Socialist bug pretty badly, and being young enough to think I could reform the world and all the people in it overnight, I made a lot of terrifically inflammatory and



declamatory speeches. How my uncle heard about them I never knew—don't know now, for that matter—and he didn't say a thing until afterwards, when he threw me over. Fact is, I was just a convenience, the heir he needed until he got the widow's mites. So I couldn't be expected to rend my garments and tear my hair out by handfuls, now could I? As for the coin—well, it's a mighty handy thing to have in the house, but I'm not lying awake any!"

He certainly did not look as if he were, leaning there against the trunk of the tree, his fine head thrown back a little, showing the strong, sun-bronzed throat above the loose collar of the khaki shirt, his laughing eyes fixed on her face. There was about him an air of debonair self-confidence, the self-confidence of one who had dined with Death again and again, a self-confidence founded on self-knowledge, very far removed from conceit. He might be defeated; but so long as breath was in his body, it was impossible to imagine him as submitting to defeat.

"Do forgive me for gassing away like this!" he suddenly exclaimed. "I don't usually talk so much about myself—cross my heart! But you're such a jolly good listener!"

"Oh, but I like to hear you talk!" Lynne earnestly assured him. "Honest Injun, I do. You've seen and done things, and I haven't seen or done anything. I've always longed to go abroad! You know, I believe when I die, if I've been very, very good, my soul won't go straight to heaven but be allowed to float around down here, so I can have a look at all the countries I wanted so dreadfully to see while I was alive—Egypt first, and France and India and England and Greece and Italy and Scotland and Japan——"

"Why Egypt first?" he asked.

"I suppose because of my father, and the things he

sometimes told me. He was a great scholar and archaeologist. He'd done some excavating in Egypt, and he used to say he belonged there."

"Funny! I've felt like that.—Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"I'm not sure. I don't quite——" She paused, twisting a bit of feathery grass between her fingers. "It sort of explains things, doesn't it?"

His eyes were thoughtful. He was looking away from her now, towards the summit of the mountain.

"When I was in Egypt," he said slowly, "I felt as if I belonged—had lived there once. And the same in England, though that may have been just reading and inheritance. There's a hill in North Wales, near Conway. I climbed it while I was there—and I'd have sworn I'd climbed it before! Have you ever felt——?"

She nodded. "Not about places—only people."

He turned quickly. "I know! As if they were old friends—or enemies. The first time I ever saw you I was sure I knew you—D'you remember?"

"Yes. And I was certain I'd met you somewhere."

"Queer! Isn't it?"

"It's rather—frightening."

"Oh, I don't know!" He settled himself more comfortably against the trunk of the tree, looking up at the tenuous tracery of the leaves upon the azure background of the sky. "If we're not afraid to keep on being, why mind having been? And if that sensation of knowing people means we really have known them before and hated or—or cared for them a lot, isn't it a kind of assurance that we may keep on caring . . . afterwards?"

She drew a deep breath. "Perhaps! And the most horrible thing about death is that it means—separation."

"I'm not sure it does—not if the caring's big enough. My best pal went West five years ago—oh, I haven't seen him, or had any automatic writing or ouija-board

stunts! But I haven't forgotten him, or what he was—is—to me, and sometimes I've felt as if he must somehow be . . . near me."

"You believe, then, that we've lived before, and will go on living—afterwards?"

"Afterwards, yes. About the before—well, I'm doubtful. Only as you say, the theory does explain ever so many things! Like—like love at first sight, for instance."

She had taken off her hat, and the flickering leaves made a changeful, living background for her small wistful face and candid eyes.

"A love that could hold through all changes . . . through life, and death, and life again . . . !" Her voice was low, and very dreamy.

From the swaying branches a brown-edged leaf fluttered down into her lap. She touched it, crumbling it between her fingers almost unconsciously. But the feel of it against her finger-tips remained with her during all the years of her life.

She spoke again, lingeringly, a little sadly: "People forget so easily—and so quickly!"

"Not if it's—the big thing! The love that isn't stronger than death, that can't hold through and beyond death, may be very sweet and pleasant and all that, but it isn't—magnificent!—Will you please look at that little imp trying to smuggle himself into my pocket!"

Foiled in his quest for nuts, the chipmunk ran away, but only a very little way. Sitting up on his haunches, he looked at them so reproachfully that they laughed together, which seemed to hurt his feelings, since he disappeared with a disdainful whisk of the tail and was seen no more that afternoon. Perhaps he thought that having played his part in the human comedy he was now free to return to his own affairs.



### CHAPTER THIRD

At West Hillsdale, walking is the one and only possible form of exercise. The stony unevenness of the narrow, steep road is warranted to wreck the springs of any automobile, and is equally unsatisfactory for riding and driving, even if horses and motors were available—which they are not. Neither golf course nor tennis courts exist anywhere near, and there is no body of water large enough to make boating practicable. So the only thing to do is to walk, and no one of the gossip-loving females in the boarding house wondered that every afternoon should see Lynneth going along the road up the mountain.

She would not have cared, whatever they might conjecture. For her, existence had become a thing of wonder and of beauty. A rainbow dream; a shimmering, incandescent glory. She lived only during the hours she and Geoffrey were together. Away from him, she went over them again and again, not so much recalling as permeated through and through with a consciousness of his words and looks and tones.

Never once did they, in so many words, agree to meet. That they should do so was tacitly understood, as marvellous as sunrise, and as unnecessary to mention. They read together, walked together, talked together, exchanging or sharing ideas and opinions, perplexities and whimsicalities. They told each other their past histories, in happy certainty that every tiniest detail would be of absorbing interest. Little by little, Geoffrey related the full story of his journeyings in lands whose names were magic words to Lynneth; Paris and London, Arabia and Egypt and Hindustan. He told it well, too, in swift

keen sentences. Crowding experiences had only increased his zest for living. Impossible to picture him as ever becoming bored or blasé, though in his twenty-eight years he had seen and done more than many see or do in a life-time. And the girl whose existence had been so much less rich than his was the most eager of listeners.

After a while he told of his ambitions, of the improved form of giant air-craft which as yet existed only in his brain. His imagination was busy with visions of a passenger-service between New York and Chicago, New York and London. . . .

The girl caught the glow of his ideas, saw the linking-up he described, the great fleets sailing through the air. Ardently she responded to his enthusiasm. . . .

And at last, though this in baldest, briefest fashion, he told her what he had never yet told any one—the tale of those adventures down upon the earth and up among the clouds which had won him the D. S. O. and the M. M., as well as the *Croix de Guerre*.

“Any of the other fellows would have done as much, and lots of them did a great deal more! I was lucky, that’s all,” he protestingly commented.

But if slow to speak of his own exploits, he was ready enough to talk about his friends’, and especially those of a certain Roderick Malvin, who; “Ought to have had the Victoria Cross, and never got a darn thing! It isn’t only that he’s plucky; most chaps are. But you can depend on him. No matter what happened, you’d know he’d never let you down. Awfully shy, and not a bit of a talker, but if ever you were in a tight place he’d get you out of it, somehow!”

Lynneth soon felt very well acquainted with this same Roderick Malvin, the older man Geoffrey never tired of praising; with Jim Thorne; and with Langston Vernon, that “best pal” who had gone West, but of

whom Geoffrey always spoke as though he were alive, and very near.

And in return Lynneth, who had been so reticent with Danvers Calhoun, who had found it difficult to confide freely even in Joan, revealed to this other, this man she had, reckoning in days and hours, known so short a time, yet felt that she had known always, most of the small incidents of her quiet life. Reflected in his sympathy, much of that life appeared to her under a new aspect. She grew at once further away from and more keenly compassionate towards the play-starved, love-starved child, the lonely, romantic girl who had been herself, yet now seemed so far apart from herself.

Of the future, neither had as yet spoken, though both occasionally realized, and realized with a shock, how rapidly the golden weeks were flying past. The reports on aviation fields and the needs of the air-craft service upon which Geoffrey had been working were nearly finished. The last of the wild roses was long since gone; here and there the sumach showed crimson, and the golden-rod was breaking into bloom. Lynneth's pallour had been replaced by blush-rose tints, her grey eyes were starry, all her movements instinct with a blithe unconscious grace. Geoffrey, more bronzed than ever, seemed if possible even more intensely, glowingly alive. Breathless, expectant, both awaited the coming of the fulfilling hour.

And as if it wished to be kind to them, to help them gather full sheaves of happy memories, the weather remained clear. Showers fell only at night or during the early morning, and though there were some scorching days, they were exceptional.

"Do you know we haven't had a single thunder-storm since I came?" Lynneth remarked one afternoon, as a heavy cloud which had been lowering in the east was finally dispelled by the victorious spears of the setting sun. "And yet they say this place is famous for them!"



"I'm glad of it!" Geoffrey exclaimed vehemently. "I'm glad of it! I *hate* thunder-storms!"

She perfectly understood. Thunder, reverberating among these hills, must sound very like the rumbling of the great guns.

He went on quickly; "The Thornes have told me of some awful ones. There's a house near the top of the mountain that was struck and burned down not long ago."

"What in the world do you suppose ever induced any one to build 'way up there?" commented Lynneth, trying to coax the little chipmunk, whom they had named Cap'n Cuttle, to climb up her shoulder. He had made friends with her almost at once, but he was, she declared, of a variable disposition and afflicted with the artistic temperament.

"It's quite a yarn. Mr. Thorne told me the whole story the other night."

After a long walk, they were resting on their favourite bench beside the pool. He wriggled his shoulders into a more comfortable position against the trunk of the over-spreading tree before he went on:

"Once upon a time, there was a rich old farmer who married a pretty young wife. She was a Hillsdale girl, but she'd spent a lot of time in Eastdale—that's something of a town, you know—and there she'd met and fallen in love with a young chap about her own age. Well, he went off to make his fortune, according to the best and most popular traditions, and she promised to wait until he'd done it. She didn't. She got tired of waiting, and married the rich old farmer. They lived in the valley a while, but the girl was discontented and the farmer tyrannical. He knew she'd married him for his money, and he seems to have been determined she shouldn't get anything out of it. So what did he do but build that house, miles away from everything and everybody! There he kept her practically a prisoner

until she gave up and died. He lived to be over ninety, and might be living still if the house hadn't been struck by lightning. He was burned to death. But it's her ghost that they say haunts the ruins."

"Did the lover ever come back?"

"Never! He settled somewhere in the Middle West, married, had a large family, and prospered exceedingly. The girl got the worst of it!"

"No more than she deserved, if she couldn't be loyal!" Lynneth exclaimed with all the confidence of inexperience. Then added; "Have you ever been up there?"

"To the house? Not all the way. The road goes straight to it, but they tell me the last mile or so is pretty well over-grown. Would you like to try it?"

"Yes; wouldn't you? The first clear cool day——"

He tossed a nut to the chipmunk. It chanced to hit the shyly trustful Cap'n Cuttle on the nose and he scurried away, then stopped and looked back, as one grieved, but willing to forgive.

Geoffrey threw him another, then asked abruptly, and without a glance at Lynneth:

"Why not tomorrow, if it's fine?"

Beneath the commonplace question was that which set her heart to beating swiftly. It needed an effort to reply casually: "Very well; tomorrow. The sunset looks as if it were going to be clear."

She had turned from him, intently studying the west, where the August sun was going down in a final blaze of scarlet and gold and amethyst splendour. But he could see the lovely lines of her throat, the curves of cheek and chin. A wide, floppy straw hat concealed the upper part of her face, and made yet darker the soft shadows of her hair. Through the thin organdie veiling them, the whiteness of her neck and shoulders gleamed mistily.

He lowered his voice. "I've something to tell you. My reports are finished. I did the last bit of work

on them today. I'll write my chief tonight, and I may have to go on to Washington at any time."

She turned to him swiftly. "Those last changes came out all right, then? You said you weren't sure if your calculations——"

"Ain't you feared you'll ketch your death o' cold, settin' out here? Beats all, the way city folks does love to set out o' doors!"

Farmer Thorne's voice startled the two on the wooden seat. Lynneth flushed; Geoffrey was pale under his tan.

"We have to be indoors so much, you see!" the girl exclaimed quickly. Snatching at the old man's pet grievance, she glanced at one of the three cows he was driving before him, and asked; "Did Daisy go far to-day?"

The bait was swallowed instantly. Though in all other respects an admirable, even an exemplary animal, Daisy had an errant strain in her blood. Or perhaps it was only that she was an inveterate optimist, always hoping to find something better than her poor and stony pasturage. Her adventures had been many, and Mr. Thorne enjoyed few things so much as telling about them. Lynneth's question confirmed his impression of her as a young woman who, apart from her citified passion for fresh air, was uncommonly sensible. And so the three strolled down the road together, following the cows through the slowly gathering twilight.

When Lynneth entered the dining room at Jenkins', she found on her plate a letter from Joan. The sight of the odd, characteristic scrawl was like a friendly handclasp. She was glad to be in touch with Joan that evening! But—what an odd letter!

"Dear Lynneth:—I'm going away on business, and won't be able to write you for some time. Address me at the shop, as usual. I'll get the letters when I come back. It's the dull season, and Madge can manage alone all right.

"If you get to town before I do, go straight to the apart-



ment. It's ready, and Madge has the keys. Glad you're so much better, and having a good time.

"Dear Lynn, you're the best little pal any woman ever had. You've helped me a lot, and I care for you more than I've ever been able to say.

"Joan."

Lynneth knit her brows. Of all the queer letters! It wasn't—no, it wasn't a bit like Joan! The sudden little outbreak at the end—did it mean that something had happened?

But what could have happened? Their profits had never been large, but they'd increased steadily, and they had been congratulating themselves that the business seemed firmly on its feet. Were Joan's private affairs bothering her? She read the letter once more; and again.

It wasn't a bit like Joan!

The hurry and constraint of the first part were queer; and the end was queerer still, dear and sweet as it was. Joan had helped her a lot; she'd always known that, and said it, but the idea of her having helped Joan——! She hadn't, of course; not really. But it was dear of Joan to think so, and if she hadn't thought so she wouldn't have written it.

Which didn't make the letter less puzzling, nor alter the fact that it wasn't in the least like Joan!

Something must have happened. But—what?

## CHAPTER FOURTH

"SURE it isn't going to be too hot a tramp for you?" asked Geoffrey anxiously.

Lynneth smiled, sweet lips curving exquisitely, long lashes hiding the light in her eyes. She knew he had set his heart on this little expedition. And she would have gone, had the sun blazed ten times more fiercely than it did.

"Oh, I don't think it's so terribly warm!" she replied, cheerfully mendacious. "We can take a rest when we get there, and it will be beautifully cool coming home."

"All right, then. Here—give me that thing of yours." Which indefinite term referred to the little rose-coloured woolen wrap, a relic of Washington Square, Lynneth carried on her arm. No matter how hot the day might be, up here among the hills it was foolish to go far without something of the sort.

She surrendered it to him, demanding with playful curiosity: "What's in your knapsack? Did Mrs. Thorne——"

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions," he laughed. "What's a picnic without a surprise?"

She made an absurd little face at him, betraying the dimple that lived near a corner of her mouth.

August was all but ended, and the sun blazed down as if trying to make full use of all his power before autumn interposed her cool shield between his rays and the weary earth. For many days no drop of rain had fallen; the ground was hard and dry, the trees and bushes parched and suffering. Lynneth paused to exclaim regretfully over the grey thirsty moss, the wee flowers and tiny green growths massed in a sheltered nook on the top of a towering stone which she called

her Japanese garden, and had amused herself by tending as best she could, keeping it free from slugs, picking away the dead leaves and small dry twigs which fell upon it from the over-shadowing trees. The voices of the brooks were stilled; only a thread of water trickled over the stones, and the trout were nowhere to be seen.

They walked on steadily, up and up, past the landmarks which during these weeks had become their friends, to the unfamiliar regions above. Once they stopped to cool off and take breath, perching precariously on the top rail of a fence at the edge of a grove where silver birches stood, white and slender as so many nymphs of the woodland. Now and then they talked, sometimes gayly, sometimes seriously, but for the most part they went on in that happy silence which is the ultimate test of companionship.

Presently the road narrowed, becoming over-grown with weeds and brambles, rougher than ever, a mere trace of wagon-ruts winding between tall rocks. Geoffrey took the lead; she followed in the path he cleared for her. And so at last they reached the ruined house.

Expecting to see it though they were, it came upon them as suddenly as did the long-sought Dark Tower upon Childe Roland. Burned and blackened and grim, it crouched there like some gaunt old hag, bowed and scarred with years of evil living. A hideous thing it was, a thing to shrink from, to abhor. And it seemed to have a strange and horrible atmosphere of its own which brooded about it heavily, weighed down with woe. But it was no clean sorrow which so darkly hung around that ruined house.

Lynneth shivered. Then just because she wanted to turn and run, she advanced resolutely. But she could not prevent her voice from sinking a little as she said: "It is a desolate sort of place, isn't it?"

Geoffrey's reply was indirect. "I don't wonder people say it's haunted! Think how eerie it must be after



nightfall, when the bats begin to fly!" He glanced speculatively up to where the blackened rafters protruded like bones from which the flesh had as yet but partly rotted, and added with a sudden mischievous boyishness: "Wish we could get a look inside!"

Forthwith he began to prowl around the house, as intent on discovering some means of ingress as any ten-year-old urchin. The flames had burned straight through the roof, a greater part of which had long since fallen in. Not a fragment of glass remained in any of the blankly staring windows; most of the building was a charred wreck, sullenly disintegrating. But freakishly enough, the wilful blaze had spared a single corner room on the ground floor, leaving it, not undamaged, but with its walls and ceiling at least free from gaping holes, while the heavy wooden shutters shielding its two windows were still tightly fastened. With a good deal of difficulty and the accumulation of much iron-rust, Geoffrey contrived to unlatch one of these and throw it back.

"Look! This must have been the living room!" he announced eagerly.

Lynneth went to stand beside him. The room had been stripped of its furnishings, all but one broken-down chair, which seemed grimly, hopelessly awaiting the return of those who would never come again. And over the stained mantel-shelf a mirror hung, cracked and blurred, reflecting the mournful emptiness.

"Can't you just imagine those two sitting there facing each other night after night, and night after night?" Geoffrey exclaimed in a low voice, as though consciousness of some hovering, listening presence forbade him to speak aloud. "She hating him, and dying by inches of her hatred, and he—— Do you suppose he knew, and . . . waited? God! What a way to live! I'd rather crash, and die quickly!"

"Come away!" Lynneth's cry was an entreaty. "Come

away! Don't try to go in. I can't stand this place—I loathe it!”

“So do I!” He turned abruptly, back towards the sunlit slopes stretching away from the ruin, and drawing a long breath gave himself a little shake, like a dog emerging from deep water. “Let's climb those rocks over there.”

From the level space of moss and turf, tucked snugly in among the boulders and shadowed by the wide-spreading branches of a splendid horse-chestnut the house, though scarcely a quarter of a mile distant, was quite invisible. It was cool here in the shade, with the tree-tops rustling gently overhead, and the sun-drenched earth, warm and deeply breathing, rolling away in great undulations down, far down to where the cities lay, fantastic as monsters out of some folk-lore tale. It was all a blending of multitudinous hues of grey and green, shading at times almost to blackness. Only here and there a clump of golden-rod shone yellow, or a maple, nestling in some hollow, blazed out in triumphant scarlet.

Geoffrey first made Lynneth comfortable, with her back against a low rock and her wrap for a pillow, then flung himself at full length upon the thick moss, a cigarette between his lips and his cap drawn over his eyes. There was no sign, anywhere that they could see, of any human existence save their own. From some thicket below, far down the slope, a lark rose soaring into the sky.

“It's a good old world!” Geoffrey murmured presently. “It's a jolly good old world!”

Lynneth felt a sudden lump rise in her throat. He was so full of life, so swift and keen and eager to enjoy, who for nearly five years had challenged Death, had seen Death——!

Somehow he divined her thought, and he turned his head and smiled at her with clear bright eyes, eyes memory-shadowed, but without one trace of fear.

"Yes, I can feel like that in spite of—of all the horrors!" He was answering her unspoken thought, as he had done more than once. "I'm not making light of them—heaven forbid!" His eyes darkened; his fingers pulled absently at a blade of grass. "There've been times when they seemed to blot out everything else. The day they told me Verney—my best pal—had gone West, I——"

He broke off; his lips twitched, and he bit them hard. She knew how he had loved that "best pal" of his, and she tried to find something to say which might a little deflect, without jarring on his thoughts.

"Isn't it queer how that phrase came back? It's three or four thousand years since the Egyptians spoke of their dead as 'The Westerners,' and now we——" She paused.

"They reasoned—and hoped. We reason—and hope. The essentials are still the same. God—the human soul—the life beyond death. They conceived of them in their fashion, and we conceive of them in ours. But it's only a change of form. In spite of all the thousands of years that have passed and the millions who've died, we don't *know* one bit more than they did!"

"But you said you believed——"

"I do believe—I believe that God exists, and soul exists, and will go on existing. Anything else seems to me unthinkable. The fact that we can't form any just idea of God, and usually get only an Impersonal Force or a glorified man when we try, isn't any argument. A year-old child couldn't form any adequate idea of a Darwin or a Plato! And it's the same with our ideas of the life to come. We can't imagine what it's like any more than a man born blind can imagine the ocean or the sunrise. But the ocean and the sunrise are there just the same. Life's an adventure—and Death's a greater one! We leap into the dark."

"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave," Lynneth quoted softly.



He flashed a grateful glance at her. "Yes! It all comes back to that—do your part as well as you can, live your life bravely, 'And with God be the rest!'"

The hush that fell, not between but over them both, came like a benediction.

"Perhaps I've no right to talk," he went on presently. "I've had a lot out of life, and—well, I'm blood-brother to the man in Kipling's poem—you remember?—'E liked it all.' *I've* liked it all! If I should crash next time I go up—I certainly don't intend to!—I wouldn't feel as if I'd been cheated. I've had some jolly good times, and some splendid pals, and then—then you came and made these last weeks perfect. . . ."

His voice sank in a long breath. And Lynneth could not speak, dared not even try to speak, so vivid to her was the vision he had suggested, then quickly endeavoured to dispel.

So there was silence between them, a silence which lasted until a venturesome robin lit on a nearby twig, calling to his plump mate, and when she fluttered down to him berating her soundly. Then a couple of chipmunks stole out, and sat up to survey them.

"Can't we find something for them to eat?" Lynneth asked, retreating into the commonplace.

"Good idea! They're probably hungry—I know I am!"

"Let me unpack the knapsack. Please! I want to."

"All right. Wait a minute—that's an obstinate beast of a buckle! There! Now you can investigate."

"Sandwiches. And cookies. *And* apple-pie. And——"

"Chocolate cake!" he interrupted gleefully. "Two scrumptious big hunks of it! And there's iced coffee in the thermos. How's that for a spread?"

"We'll never be able to eat it all!"

"Oh, won't we! Just you wait and see. And we'll give those poor relations of Cap'n Cuttle's the finest feast they ever had in all their greedy little lives!"

So they ate and drank and threw morsels to the chipmunks and made absurd jokes and laughed at them as if they had been marvels of humour, and enjoyed themselves as those can who are comrades as well as lovers. Yet all the while each was conscious of playing a part, not to deceive, but to make it easier for the other to sustain the corresponding rôle. And they never turned their eyes to where, unseen, the ruined house crouched beneath its invisible burden.

Consequently they were unaware of the great black clouds which, as the afternoon waned, began to gather fast. Each was absorbed in the other, while each had an unacknowledged sense of expectancy, of awaiting the swift and sure approach of something—tremendous.

They did not notice that the songs of the birds had changed to a shrill twittering, that the lengthening shadows were not enough to account for the rapid failing of the light. Even the first low growl of thunder was unheeded. Not until the second came did they start, and look around, and tingle with mingled excitement and dismay to see the huge, thunder-headed clouds sweeping forward in a magnificent rush across the sky. Already the distant trees had begun to sway; the rustle of leaves was changing to the clash of branches. Both sprang to their feet, Geoffrey catching up his knapsack and Lynneth's wrap.

"We must run for it!" he exclaimed. "The storm's going to break in no time!"

As if to emphasize his words, a streak of lightning ripped through the clouds. The sun had vanished utterly, the trees wailed in the gusts that twisted Lynneth's fluttering skirt close about her limbs and snatched unsuccessfully at her broad-brimmed hat.

An instant she stood poised, both hands lifted to her head, a slim, lithe figure outlined against the wind-swept background of the tossing trees. Then another blast almost whirled her off her feet.

"We can't possibly get down the mountain in this!" she cried. But there was no dismay in her voice. Something wild, exultant, had risen singing in her blood, chanting its response to the Pagan challenge of the wind.

"Of course we can't!" He had seized her arm and was hurrying her forward, almost at a run. "We'll have to break into the old house. That one room—it'll shelter us for a while. There's nowhere else we can go. We must hurry——"

Alone, she would have stayed out in any storm rather than enter that ghostly room. But for her, fear could not exist where Geoffrey Tressel was. Her wind-whipped skirts seemed doing their best to hinder her, yet in a very few minutes they had reached the house. The front door was locked, but its hinges hung loose, and Geoffrey put his shoulder to it and forced it open. There in the roofless hall, piled high with *débris*, they could look straight up into the livid sky. He remembered the direction of that undamaged room; a moment, and they stood within it.

The darkness was now so dense that they could see each other's faces only as a dim blur, yet the cracked mirror over the mantelshelf reflected a faint and ghastly light. Lynneth's breath was coming rapidly; her sense of some great event impending was quickened, intensified.

Geoffrey struck a match, and held it high above his head. "The old place looks water-tight," he exclaimed cheerfully; an undercurrent of excitement pulsed through his tone. "I don't see any signs of the roof having leaked, but—— Ah-h! There it comes!"

An instant of silence, a second's pause. And then, with first a hissing and then a roaring smother of water, the storm came swooping down. . . .

Many of the slats in the old wooden shutters were splintered or broken, and through these open spaces the



lightning seemed to leap into the room, dark now that Geoffrey's match had gone out. Again and again the great jagged sword thrust downward through the slanting sheets of rain, while overhead the thunder rolled, volley upon volley, peal after peal, as though the Titans had scaled high Olympus and were once more waging desperate warfare against the gods.

Drawn by a force they did not try to resist, the refugees went to a window through whose broken shutter they could see far out over the trees and fields sloping down the mountain. All the world seemed enveloped in a swirling cloak of rain. . . .

Some fifty feet away, the centre of a group of smaller trees that seemed to cower about it for protection, a great oak towered. Superb leader of a sorely stricken host, its branches were like arms flung out in wild entreaty. And the furious rain-drenched blasts lashed them viciously, with a kind of horrible, concentrated rage.

Lynneth's fascinated eyes clung to that great oak, that leader praying to the storm gods for their mercy upon those lesser trees, his followers and suppliants, not upon himself. . . .

But of mercy they had none. The thunder now sounded directly over the house. So fast its crashes came, that between them there was scarcely breathing space. The clashing branches, the roar of the rain and Valkyrie scream of the wind, joined with the thunder in one mighty symphony of destruction, magnificent, terrible, awe-inspiring. Human speech seemed impossible, almost an impertinence. Yet Nature's wild triumphant dominance made human companionship an aching need.

And there in the black desolation of that hate-haunted room, lit by the glare of lightning as by flashes from hell, the hands of those two met and clasped. . . .

Nearer to each other they drew, and nearer—when

suddenly there came a great burst of flame, rending, gashing the heavens asunder, and with it such a crash as if some comet, fleeing through space, had hurled itself upon the angry earth.

Then for the first time Lynneth cried out. The bolt had struck the great oak, splitting it in two.

"Lynneth!" It was Geoffrey's voice, but Geoffrey's voice as she had never heard it before. And the noise of the wind and rain and thunder died into nothingness.

"Lynneth!" he said. And once again; "Lynneth——?"

She could not answer. But as his arms closed about her, she lifted her face to his, and gave him her lips. . . .

And how long it was before the storm passed and they were able to go down the steep, moonlit road, neither ever knew.

## CHAPTER FIFTH

"LYNNETTE, belovedest, I'm going to be practical!"

"Oh, Geoff dear, what for?"

"As a soon-to-be married man, I'm feeling my responsibilities. Now stop flirting with Cap'n Cuttle, and attend to me!"

"He won't flirt any more! That's my last nut, and the mercenary little wretch knows it. See him scamper!"

"He's thinking of his home. Go to the chipmunk, oh thou frivolous one, and acquire wisdom! It's his example that's inspiring me. Comfortable, sweetheart?"

"Perfectly!"

Lynneth's answer came on a contented sigh. Seated in their favourite place beside the pool, watching the sunlight play upon the water and glint back from the quaint old ring, a glorious ruby once the property of an Eastern princess, which Geoffrey had given her only the day before, with her head against his shoulder and his arm about her, she was both deeply content and thrilling with happiness.

This last week! Was it upon the homely old earth, or in some Land of Faërie that she had been living? And what a beautiful world it was! Beautiful as she had never dreamed it could be before he came, who had transmuted living into wonder and ecstasy. Her old visions of the enchanted garden seemed poor and pallid to her now! She stroked his hand lightly, with sensitive finger-tips whose touch was eloquent, and he took and held them to his lips. Over their heads the leaves rustled musically, as if the dryad of the tree were murmuring good wishes to them.



"This isn't being very practical!" observed Lynne, a note of tenderest laughter lilting through her voice.

"No; it's ever so much better!" He paused a moment, then added in a deeper tone; "Isn't it wonderful, when this is so marvelous, to know that the best is all before us? Our life—together!"

She did not answer—not in words. But of those there was no need.

It was later, and quite a good deal later, that he said: "Lynne mine, there are things we've simply got to think about. We can't stay here always."

"I wish we could!"

"So do I! But you know I may be sent for at any time."

"About that Government report?"

"Yes, partly. And we've got to decide what we're going to do, and how and where we're going to live."

"As long as we're together, nothing else matters. My only fear——" She stopped abruptly, biting her lip.

He understood. "You imaginative child! During the war, of course the flying men had to take chances, like everybody else. But now—why, unless you try a lot of fool stunts, a plane's as safe as an automobile any day, and lots better fun! I'll take you up some time. You wouldn't be afraid?"

"With you? Of course not!"

"Wait until I've worked out my idea for the new stabilizer! Then you'll see! And that reminds me; I told you once I'd only a very few thousands outside my pay? To be strictly accurate, I've just about sixteen."

"Well! we don't want to indulge in any very riotous living, do we?"

"That depends! And I've had offers from a big concern——"

She sat up straight and suddenly, interrupting him. Turning so that she could put both hands on his shoulders, she met his eyes squarely, and spoke, very quietly,

very earnestly; "Geoff, whatever happens, don't let me be a hindrance! If you can do your best work in the army, why, then, stay in the army, and never mind about the money. *I* don't! But it would make me perfectly miserable to think I was keeping you back——"

"Lynnette, you darling!"

He caught her to him, kissing her eyelids, her hair, her sweet and generous mouth. . . .

It was some time before they returned to such prosaic matters as dollars and cents. Then he explained:

"I don't believe I could stay in the army if I wanted to, sweet. They only kept me on because I had some special information they needed, and I'll soon be turned out into the cold, cold world with all the rest of the temporary officers. I'm not sorry. It's my belief that the development of aviation along commercial and passenger lines is going to be the biggest thing of the century. And I want the United States to lead, not sit back and let other countries build craft that'll chase ours out of the air! The big concern I spoke of is made up of half a dozen astoundingly rich men who see this thing as I do. They'll take me on, give me a free hand, and coin galore. You see——"

He plunged into a semi-technical discourse, of which Lynne understood a good deal more than she would have done a few weeks before, but not enough to weaken her secret resolve to get books and do some studying as soon as possible. The general outline, however, was clear enough, and her imagination had long since been fascinated by the idea of great white fleets of air-craft speeding from city to city, which was Geoffrey's vision, and his hope.

Then they reverted to their personal affairs. Their headquarters would be in New York.

"We'll try to find an apartment in the very top of one of the big houses, so we can look out over everything," she largely suggested, and he agreed. They would have

a huge living room, they decided, with an open fire and plenty of windows where the sun would pour in all day long. They were both ineradicably optimistic.

Suddenly; "Oh, I forgot!" Geoffrey exclaimed. "I meant to tell you. I had a letter from Rod last night—Roderick Malvin, you know. He was gassed pretty badly, and they've given him a long leave. His younger brother's been in New York with a branch of a London firm ever since the war, and he's coming over to see him. I'm sure you'll like old Rod! He's such a bully good sort—one of the best."

Laughter danced in Lynneth's eyes. "So I've inferred from an occasional remark you've let drop," she replied demurely.

He laughed with her. "Well, but Rod's a real hero!" he protested. "I want him for our first guest—him and Joan. I'm dreadfully curious about your Joan!"

"That'll be our house-warming," she nodded.

"Yes. But we're not going to stay home all the time! We'll travel too. You shall see Egypt and India. We'll motor through France and England, and sail on the Mediterranean, and do all the things you've dreamed about."

"It's all like a dream! It's much too wonderful to be real!"

"Nothing's too wonderful to be real since I've found you!"

"Suppose—somehow—we'd missed each other? But I don't believe we could—When did you *know*?"

"That first night. I wouldn't admit it, though."

"Nor I. It seemed absurd, when I'd only seen you once! But I—I used to hunt up the army orders in the newspapers," she confessed quite shamelessly.

"Well, I took to reading the society columns!" he admitted. "I developed a perfectly abnormal interest in them. And I kept planning to come back to New York, and the Powers-That-Be kept sending me off to other places. I did try to find you when I got to town



this June, and traced you as far as the bookshop, but there they told me you were away and wouldn't be back before autumn. If I hadn't written to Ashby Lawrence, and if he hadn't advised you to come here——!" His pause was eloquent.

"I never liked Ashby Lawrence so much before!" she averred, smiling up at him with radiant eyes.

Not for one moment did she ever shrink from acknowledging the depth and power and passion of the love which was her glory as it was his. To both it was at once as splendid, as marvelous, and as simple as sunlight. Life without it was unthinkable; had they ever really lived at all before its dawning? How *could* they have lived divided, who in heart and mind and soul were one?

"We've got the big thing," he said slowly, feeling for words to express what was all but inexpressible. "It isn't—well, it isn't just the obvious happiness that comes to so many, and lasts only a little while, and can be found again with some one else."

"We belong," she replied with an intensity of feeling too deep and strong for anything but quietude. "It isn't, it can't be temporary. I think I always knew you were somewhere, and that some day . . . this . . . would happen."

"And now it has happened, and nothing can ever blot it out. Nothing. No matter how old we grow, or what life does to us, it will still be the same. We can't"—and the ring in his voice was like a challenge flung at Fate—"we can't be parted, you and I!"

Confidently as he had spoken, she replied; "No. We can't be parted, you and I."

Then Geoffrey looked up to the rising ground, topped by a thicket of trees beyond which was the Thornes' house. And his clasp of her hand tightened suddenly.

"Belovedest," he exclaimed quickly, "I said I might be sent for any moment."

She caught her breath. "I know."

"I may get a telegram today. If it comes——"

The pulse in her throat was beating hard and fast. Her glance followed his across the slope, all white and yellow with Queen Anne's-lace and golden-rod, down which tow-headed little Dicky, youngest of the Thorne boys, was racing at top speed.

"I think," she said steadily, "I think it's coming now."

Dicky had come, delivered the scrawled message telephoned over from the office ten miles away, been thanked and praised, and then rushed off on some desperately urgent business dear to his ten-year-old heart, before she spoke again.

"Well?" she asked quietly.

He paused an instant. Then:

"Lynnette, will you marry me tomorrow?" he asked.

"But, Geoffrey——!"

"I'm called to New York. My chief's coming on from Washington, and I'm to report to him at Governors Island on Thursday. This is Tuesday. I can telephone over to that nice old clergyman at Eastdale, and ask him to be ready with a couple of witnesses. We'll start early tomorrow morning, be married in Eastdale, and take the ten-six for New York. That'll get us into the city late in the afternoon." He was trying to speak calmly, but his voice vibrated like an over-charged wire, and the bit of coarse paper shook in his hand. "I've got to be with the chief at eleven, Thursday morning, and after I've seen him I'll know what else we can do. Only first . . . Lynnette . . . dearest . . . ?"

He did not touch even her finger-tips. But his eyes pleaded and promised.

She understood, and she flushed deeply. All her nerves were taut and quivering.

For a moment she could not speak. But it was neither fear nor reluctance which held her silent. . . .

She looked up at him. She had no need of words to make clear her answer.

And on the following morning they stood side by side in the airless little parlour of the country parsonage, with wax flowers under a glass case upon the centre table, and large conch shells decorating the mantelpiece, and while crayon portraits glared at them, were married by the musty old clergyman, whose prim wife and freckled fat daughter were the only witnesses of the ceremony.

Kneeling by the window the night before, her trunk packed and all her material preparations made, Lynneth had longed for Joan. No other woman had ever come so near to her, and though she had no doubts nor any shadow of fear, she wanted a woman to turn to, one who loved her and whom she loved. But even Joan was forgotten now.

The long railway journey seemed unreal, phantasmagorical. They talked a little now and then, spoke of the dust and of the people at the way-side stations; common-places that were mechanical, that meant less than nothing, save as they served to veil the fiery splendour. . . .

And so they came at last to the dizzy roar of the Unquiet City, and the hotel on Riverside Drive, to which Geoffrey had telegraphed for rooms, on an upper floor and overlooking the river.

"We'll be sure not to meet any one we know there," he had explained.

Dusk was falling when they were shown to their eyrie, whose height the city noises were scarcely able to reach. From the windows one could look far along the Hudson. Lights gleamed upon its banks, twinkled over the dark water from the small craft at anchor, but not at rest. There was no moon, but the sky was glorious with stars, as if the eyes of all the kindly lesser gods men have fashioned for their comradeship and solace were turned towards earth that night.





BOOK IV  
RIVERSIDE DRIVE





## BOOK IV

### RIVERSIDE DRIVE

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#### CHAPTER FIRST

WHEN Geoffrey returned from Governors Island, Lynneth was waiting for him in the sitting room overlooking the Hudson.

"What do they want?" she asked eagerly. And when he told her; "Can't I go with you?" was her immediate question.

"I'm afraid it isn't possible. You see, dear heart, the beastly thing's official. There'll be senators along, members of the Committee on Aviation, as well as my chief and the Assistant Secretary of War, and we'll have private cars and special trains and all the rest of it. I'll have to be talking planes and landing stations and so on night and day, and trying to explain technicalities in words of one syllable!" He shrugged the broad shoulders so well set off by his uniform. "It's a confounded nuisance, having this infernal jaunt coming up just now, but somehow we've got to hammer it into their heads that air-craft are necessities and not playthings."

"How long will you—will you be away, Geoff?" Her fingers were straying over the multi-coloured ribbons on his breast. She was going to keep her promise to herself never to hinder him in any way. She would utter no word of protest or lament over this separation which was coming so soon—so soon!

"Not more than three weeks—less, if I'm lucky. And

sweetheart, it will be the last time. The chief didn't promise in so many words, but he intimated plainly enough that after I'd done this job I'd be released—honourably discharged from the service. Then Lynnette, my Lynnette——”

She flushed and glowed under his kisses. Presently she asked; “When—when must you start?”

“Monday morning. We've three clear days before us. And just as soon as I get back we'll go house-hunting. It's so early in the season we'll have plenty of time to find a place,” he added optimistically. “Now what would you like to do while I'm off on this infernal trip? Go somewhere in the country, or stay on here?”

“Wouldn't staying on here be terribly expensive?” she asked with a hesitation he found altogether charming.

“It's always expensive to be even decently comfortable anywhere around New York! But there isn't the least need of your bothering. I've plenty to go on with for a while, and my salary as advising expert with the Airplane Interstate Commerce Company will begin in two or three months. It isn't as though we were going to be obliged to live on army pay all the days of our lives! We'll be wallowing in wealth and groaning over the income tax before you know what's happened!”

“Very well, then, I'd rather stay here. I'll have so much to think over and plan for, you'll be back almost before I know you've gone!”

He loved her for the effort she was making. This parting, short though it was, would be a wrench for both of them! But he remembered the philosophy he had learned in the war.

“Let's forget all about Monday morning. No knowing what may have happened by then! Today's ours, and we'll enjoy it. Tell you what; I'll get a car and we'll run out to Ardsley and have dinner at the Country Club, in a little corner all by ourselves. How would that suit my lady?”

"I'd love it! I'll be ready in fifteen minutes." And she was as good as her word.

Turning their backs on Monday morning, they gave themselves to the happiness so soon to be interrupted. In the roadster Geoffrey hired they made all-day trips into the country, coming back late in the evening to their eyrie overlooking the Hudson. Both loved the sea, as they had loved the hills. But it mattered little to either where these golden moments were passed, save that they instinctively desired outward beauty as a setting for their joy. They were together, learning all those immensely important trifles about each other which only daily living side by side can teach, while the love which they had believed complete and perfect grew in depth and strength and glory under the stimulus of a union in which mind and heart, passion and reverence, flesh and spirit mingled in a harmony at once human and divine.

So when the last hours came:

"Do you remember," Geoffrey asked, "the story of that Moorish king who after reigning fifty years counted up the days of perfect happiness he'd had in his life, and found only fourteen? When we've lived half as long, how many do you suppose we'll be able to reckon?"

"I wonder," she said softly, "I wonder if any of those days of his were as happy as our—honeymoon?"

"I doubt it! And when I think that after all, this is only the beginning—why, we haven't even seen our home yet!" They were in their sitting room at the hotel, and he drew her down beside him on the low couch by the window as he went on: "Doesn't it seem extraordinary that somewhere in the city the place that's going to be *our* home exists already? I'm glad we're both so young! I don't want to miss any of it—any of the fun or the sorrow. Because of course there will be sorrow. I know it, but somehow I don't believe it one bit. I can't imagine holding you in my arms and not feeling——"



Words failed him. . . . She thrilled, responsive to his ardour. And all that he had said remained in her memory, to be repeated again and again after he was gone.

That was what tempted her most; to shut herself up during the weeks of his absence, there where they had been so happy, and brood over all that had taken place since the moment when, looking up, she saw him standing before her on the road. His daily letters increased the temptation; she read them over and over until she knew them by heart, following his route as best she could on a big map she had bought, checking off the days on a calendar, glad of every one that passed, bringing his return by just so much the nearer. She had laid out a course of reading for herself, and she delved as best she could into the books and pamphlets that might teach her to understand more about his work. She did not want to do anything else, did not want even to think of anything but Geoffrey.

Her sound common sense, however, showed her the danger of all this. There were, and always would be, hours in which she must meet and recognize the claims of the world outside that magic circle wherein they stood alone. Among these claims Joan's was strongest, and the first thing Lynneth did after Geoffrey's departure was to make her way to the little shop on East Fifty-th Street. She had already written to Joan, not wishing her to learn of her marriage through the newspaper notices. But no reply had come.

Joan was not in the bookshop. It was Madge who welcomed her, and welcomed her joyously.

"Lynneth, you little wretch! So you've been and gone and done it! Come here and let me look at you—— Good gracious! Is it matrimony or West Hillsdale that's turned the trick? You're as fresh and pink and sweet as a rose!"

Her exclamation was entirely sincere. Since she had seen her last, the pale, wistful-looking girl had bloomed

into a lovely woman. West Hillsdale had done something; but Madge knew that love and Geoffrey Tressel had done a great deal more.

"Now sit down and tell me all about it," she demanded.

The pretty colour deepened in Lynneth's cheeks; the dancing lights were in her eyes as she smiled, but the smile itself had changed, become the outward reflection of an inner radiance.

"There isn't much—to tell," she replied happily, a just perceptible pause breaking the sentence. "Major Tressel and I had met in New York a couple of years ago, at a dance. He was up at West Hillsdale, and so we—we ran across each other again."

Madge wanted details of the wedding, and obtained a few. Then she must know where Lynneth was, and what she expected to do, and Lynneth told how Geoffrey had been obliged to go away, and that when he returned they expected to settle in New York. It was then her turn to ask questions.

"Where's Joan?" was the first.

Madge puckered her forehead. "Give it up! She said she was going away on business, but where the business was, and what the business was, I know no more than the man in the moon. Generally speaking, I'd suspect a man in the case. But since it's Joan——!"

She left it there, further comment being obviously unnecessary.

"How's the shop doing?"

"Oh, decently. Summer's always dull, of course, but now September's come things ought to pick up a bit. We've missed you, Lynn! I suppose you won't be coming back?"

Lynneth shook her head, smilingly. "My days 'At the Sign of the Broken Spindle' are over. I've retired into domesticity."

Madge sighed. "I wish I could! But the elusive mil-

lionaire remains elusive. I want a meal-ticket for the Ritz, not for Childs' !"

"Do you honestly mean you'd marry any man, if only he was rich enough?" asked Lynneth curiously.

"Would I! Like a shot. I'd rather he'd be ninety and sufficiently considerate not to linger long upon this earth, but I'd take even a very young one if he'd give me a limousine like—— Oh bother! It's stopping here!"

Lynneth glanced out of the diamond-paned bay window. "Good gracious, that's Aunt Honoria's car!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington swept into the little shop her imposing presence seemed to fill to overflowing. Confronting Madge, who had advanced to meet her:

"Please tell Miss Hilary I want to see her," she commanded graciously.

Submerged in the depths of a big chair, her back to the door, Lynneth did not move. She knew she was invisible to Mrs. Hetherington, and preferred to remain so; for a while, at least.

"Miss Hilary is away at present; is there anything I can do for you?" suggested Madge.

Mrs. Hetherington hesitated. Then said with a mixture of anxiety and reluctance she somehow made perfectly dignified; "I came to see if you could give me——er——give me Mrs. Tressel's address? She was Miss Lynneth Frear, and I——er——understand that she was with you at one time."

Lynneth's prompt emergence put an end to Madge Ayres' embarrassment.

"How do you do, Aunt Honoria?" she remarked demurely.

Mrs. Hetherington started and turned in manifest dismay. Belief that Lynneth's marriage would take her out of the shop had made that event very pleasing to her



step-aunt. And now to find her here after all! Next moment, the sight of the girl's gloves, hat and parasol reassured the estimable matron.

"My dear Lynneth," she exclaimed with unusual animation, "this is really too delightful! We were all so pleased to hear of your marriage, my dear, and I'm sure you know we wish you every happiness."

With an expert's rapid appreciation, she noted the pretty dark blue straw hat that matched the simple serge gown, the smartly cut pumps and well-fitting gloves. There was genuine satisfaction in the kiss she gave Lynneth. As in the old days she had never been quite comfortable about Paul, so in these more recent ones she had never been quite comfortable about Paul's daughter.

Lynneth cordially returned the kiss and the greeting. She had always been fond of Aunt Honoria. "I'm so surprised to see you in town at this season!" she concluded.

"Valerie's been spending the summer abroad. She came home yesterday, and I motored up from Long Island to meet her and do a little shopping. We're going back tomorrow, but as soon as we're settled in town for the winter, you must bring your husband to dine with us. I hear he's charming. You're looking splendidly, my dear, and very happy!"

"I am," Lynneth replied simply. "You've all been well, I hope? You haven't changed a bit!"

It was the truth. Her talent for shutting her eyes to everything she did not want to see had enabled Mrs. Hetherington to maintain her complexion and her serenity equally unimpaired. She was as little disturbed by the winds of the world as a plant cosily shut up in a hot-house.

"Yes, perfectly well. But, my dear, there are so many things I want to talk to you about! Won't you come home with me to lunch? Valerie had some errands to

do, and I don't expect to see her until late this afternoon."

There really is a good deal to be said for habitual placidity. Not many women could so casually have extended such an invitation to a niece whose very existence they had ignored for over a year and a half. It was a peace-offering, but a peace-offering presented in the matter-of-course way one would pass the salt and pepper.

A very little while ago Lynneth's pride—that indomitable pride of the sensitive poor—would have made her refusal immediate and instinctive. Now she had nothing to gain that she could not also give. It was Mrs. Geoffrey Tressel, not Lynneth Frear, who drove with Mrs. Hetherington to the house on Washington Square.

She entered it with a curious sensation that only for her had time passed. Here it had stood still. Not a vase nor a jar, not a rug nor a picture, was missing from its usual place. The pontifical butler, who always preceded Mrs. Hetherington to town, that her comfort might not be endangered, received her "How do you do, Wilbur?" as impassively as if she had never left the house.

Though Mrs. Hetherington asked Lynneth where she had been married, and why the ceremony had been so quietly performed, it was only as the prelude to a discussion of her own affairs, which of course included those of Lisa and Valerie.

"My dear, I only hope you may be as happy as Lisa is," she remarked with the first spoonful of clam consommé. "She and Phil are really an ideal couple! She's become one of the most notable hostesses in New York, and has such interesting people at her house! All the advanced ones, you know, who think women oughtn't to take their husbands' names. It's quite confusing sometimes, and just between ourselves, I'll admit it does make me feel rather—well, rather queer, and just a little bit improper!"

Lynneth smiled. She did not place much reliance on

her aunt's account of the relations between Phil and Lisa. And she remembered the times she had seen Phil and Valerie together, the winter after his marriage. There must have been others. But did Lisa know of them? There had at least been no break so evident it could not be ignored, dividing her from Phil.

"And Valerie?" she presently asked. "Is she engaged?"

Mrs. Hetherington sighed over her mushrooms. "No, not yet. I've expected it half a dozen times at least, but somehow——. I'll tell you in confidence, *I* think it's because Lisa hasn't approved. She has a great deal of influence over Valerie; they've always been so devoted to each other! When Lisa says; 'Mr. So-and-so may be very attractive, my dear Valerie, but I wouldn't, I honestly wouldn't advise you to accept him!' Valerie never fails to listen to her, and take her advice."

Lynneth crumbled a hot biscuit with unwitting fingers. The months rolled back. Again she stood in the little upstairs sitting room. Again heard Lisa's thin voice uttering the threat she had evidently not retracted, nor Valerie dared defy. . . .

Mrs. Hetherington was speaking. "I don't mind telling you, Lynneth, that there's a very delightful man quite devoted to Valerie just now. I like him better than any of the others, and I think she does too. He belongs to a very good family, Baltimore people of the nicest kind. He's a strict Roman Catholic, but my dear girl is so broad-minded I don't—— Why, Valerie, I thought you weren't coming back to lunch!"

Lynneth looked up quickly. That white-and-gold vision which was Valerie Hetherington flashed upon her once again.



## CHAPTER SECOND

BUT a second glance showed Lynneth that Valerie had changed. Not markedly. The golden hair was as wonderful as ever, the pink and white complexion as flawless; but there were two or three lines about the rosy mouth, and the madonna-blue eyes looked sullen. As they met Lynneth's, an odd mixture of dislike and appeal sprang into those eyes, a mixture curiously repellent.

Mrs. Hetherington stepped calmly into the breach of whose existence she was very nearly unaware.

"I met Lynneth, and brought her home with me to lunch," she remarked as if referring to a frequent, though agreeable occurrence. "Isn't she looking well?"

"Splendidly." Valerie's tone was noncommittal. She kissed the atmosphere somewhere in the neighbourhood of Lynneth's cheek. "My congratulations," she added in the same neutral tone.

Lynneth was perfectly aware that this violation of the social usage which ordains that the bridegroom be congratulated, while good wishes are offered the bride, was deliberate, and meant to be significant. But her "Thank you," was without any note of annoyance. No spite of Valerie's could hurt her now.

Mrs. Hetherington talked on, mildly, steadily, and without effort. Only the putting in of an occasional word or phrase was necessary on the part of the other two, but presently it began to seem to Lynneth that Valerie's replies were becoming longer. Longer, moreover, by the addition of sentences addressed especially to herself. And when the meal was ended:

"I'll take Lynneth upstairs and show her some of my Paris things, while you lie down," she told her mother.

with that air of doing as she pleased as a matter of course, which Lynneth knew so well.

Refusal would have been discourteous. And Lynneth was curious. Valerie wanted something. So much was certain. What could that something be?

For the first time since the day of Lisa's wedding, she entered the little sitting room. And here too, except that it wore a summer garb of chintz coverings, nothing was changed. How could Valerie endure the constant presence of all these dumb witnesses of her humiliation?

Valerie closed the door, and turned, looking at her with a kind of hard-seeming defiance which Lynneth knew to be no stronger than so much painted lead. It would bend at the lightest pressure.

"Lynneth," she asked abruptly, "do you still hate me?"

"I never hated you," Lynneth replied; and refrained from adding, "I despised you too thoroughly."

"I know I treated you badly." Valerie had dropped the simulated defiance, and appeared relieved at being rid of it. Her tone was conciliatory. "Of course, I really knew all the time that you hadn't the least idea of—of——"

"Of what you were cheating me into doing? No, I hadn't. You see," Lynneth added reflectively, "you see, I admired you very much."

She did not say "I trusted you." She knew this pampered beauty wanted admiration, not trust.

Valerie was not clever, but neither was she stupid enough entirely to miss Lynneth's meaning. And she disliked being reminded of any loss of admiration. Disliked it the more because of her reluctant, inward admission that the shy little cousin she had used as a pawn in her game of amusing herself had developed into a personality. At every other important moment in their relations she had been all but completely self-absorbed. Perception now had the force of revelation.

She looked down upon her, puzzled, her plans awry.

Lynneth had seated herself, and this yielding of what has been an advantage since man first stood upright was mute testimony to a proven self-confidence, as different from self-assurance as steel from lead.

"You know I was kind to you," Valerie insisted; and had the grace to wince a little under the clear look of the dark grey eyes. "Oh, I admit I—I used you—sometimes! Still——"

"You want something, Valerie. What is it?"

With one stroke, Lynneth had cut the knot at which Valerie was feebly plucking.

"I want you to stand by me, against Lisa!"

The old imperiousness sounded again in Valerie's voice, showed itself again in her bearing. But Lynneth knew now that it could be dominant only so long as it remained unchallenged.

"How?" she asked tersely, moving a little in the deeply upholstered chair.

Valerie's reply was indirect. "Did mamma say anything to you about Andrew Larford?"

"She spoke of a man from Baltimore. Is he the one?"

"Yes. He—I want to marry him. And Lisa——" she clenched her hands angrily. "Oh, how I *hate* Lisa!"

"So many thanks for the compliment!"

The thin voice was as metallic as ever, and as colourless, even on a note of triumph. Valerie turned. Lynneth, whose seat faced the door, met Lisa's ironic glance with one of quiet scrutiny. And she did not rise. For she alone had nothing to fear.

"You were listening!" Valerie cried bitterly; feeble even in her bitterness.

Looking from one half-sister to the other, Lynneth realized the thoroughness with which their relations had been reversed. Once it was Lisa who hated, and Valerie who regarded that hatred with contemptuous amusement. Now Valerie hated, and Lisa was contemptuous—but



Lynneth knew that Lisa's contempt was far more dangerous than Valerie's hatred.

Lisa replied only by a shrug. When she spoke, it was to Lynneth: "Whose side are you going to take this time?"

A movement of Lynneth's expressive hands repudiated the question, and everything connected with it.

"Your quarrels don't concern me," she said coolly. "I came here today on account of your mother. I didn't expect to see either of you."

"And didn't want to! You're frank, at least! But since you are here——"

"It's not necessary for me to stay!"

"Oh, Linnie dear, do back me up! Lisa's been making my life perfectly miserable!"

"You exaggerate, as usual," Lisa remarked, idly scrutinizing her pointed, highly polished finger-nails. Her back was to the light, and the brim of her hat, drawn far down over her eyes, obscured her face. "You exaggerate, as usual. I've only interfered with some of your pleasures. And now there's another man, and you fancy you want to marry him!"

Angry tears stood in Valerie's eyes. "Yes, I do!" Her voice broke. "If you weren't such a mean, spiteful cat——"

Lisa's smile was cruel. She spoke slowly, savouring the words on her lips. "Of course you're perfectly free to do as you choose. Only—you know the risk!"

Lynneth had risen. "Be generous, Lisa!" she exclaimed, denial forgotten in pity. "Be generous! Don't you think Valerie's been punished enough?"

The long jade pendants, hanging from Lisa's ears, swung with her shake of the head. "No," she replied with the same slow smile. "No; I do not."

"You're ever so much stronger than she is! You've been able to make a life for yourself—oh yes, I've heard

about you now and then! If she cares for this man——”

“I think she does,” Lisa interrupted judicially. “I really think she does. As much as she’s able to care for any one!”

“Then why not let her marry him? You’re too much of a person, Lisa, to go on forever playing dog in the manger! Give Valerie a chance.”

“What chance, please, did Valerie give me?”

“I’m not upholding Valerie! It’s you—you’re not giving yourself a chance. You’ve had your revenge. She’s in your power. Let her go before she’s desperate! Besides, you’re somebody yourself now”—with swift, intuitive skill she had found and touched the controlling cords of Lisa’s vanity—“you’re somebody yourself, not just your parents’ daughter! You can’t do what you might have done a year or two ago. You’re a leader, you’ve a leader’s prominence, a leader’s responsibilities!”

She had used the only argument that could have affected Lisa. And that it had affected her, the long pause showed. As she walked restlessly to the window and stood a moment looking out on the dusty trees and withered grass of Washington Square, Lynneth glanced at Valerie, commanding silence with the slightest of gestures. A word from Valerie might undo all that had been accomplished—if accomplishment there were!

Lisa left the window, turning again to Lynneth.

“I’ve got to think things over,” she said deliberately. “I’m not sure. . . . Perhaps you’re right! Will you come and see me tomorrow? Or would you rather I came to you? I can talk to you.” Her lips twisted in a smile, not cruel this time, only ironic. “I can talk to you quietly, and I can’t to—my sister.”

Lynneth drew back a step. She would so much prefer to stand aside from this morass of treachery and revenge and spite! But she met Valerie’s imploring look, and it was not in her to deny help when so entreated.

Valerie loved this Andrew Larford—in her way. And however different that way of love might be from Lynneth's own, she would not criticize it. "His own life for each!" Valerie should have her life if she, Lynneth, could help her win through to it.

"Yes," she agreed, though her tone was frankly reluctant. "Yes, I'll come to you tomorrow." Lisa, with her cruel smile and snatching eyes should not bring her calculated vengefulness into those rooms where she and Geoffrey had spent so many perfect hours! "But are you back in town already?"

"Only for a few days." Lisa was fumbling in her gold mesh bag, hunting for a card. "We're on our way to the opening of our new community settlement in the mountains, and it isn't quite ready for us yet." She had flicked each pronoun with a light emphasis. "Here's my address. If you'll—but somehow, I fancy you'd rather not come to lunch!" She had a tincture of the discernment Valerie lacked.

Lynneth's look met hers squarely. She did not want to break bread with Lisa.

"You're right. I'd prefer coming in the afternoon," she said.

"Very well, then. I'll expect you about four." Lisa's acceptance of the situation was complete, her departure as abrupt as her appearance.

With the closing of the door behind her, Valerie burst into protestations of affection and everlasting gratitude. Lynneth checked them sharply.

"You've nothing to thank me for; I'm not doing it for you," she said emphatically.

"Then why are you doing it?" demanded Valerie with much pettishness.

Lynneth paused. Explain that it was a sort of thank-offering for Geoffrey? A service to love, love which, however different, must yet have some faint degree of kinship to the glory Geoffrey had revealed to her? She



could no more have said these things to Valerie than she could have stripped herself naked in the streets.

At last, and quietly: "So long as I do it, isn't that enough?" she asked.

And in her tone was a finality even Valerie understood, and did not attempt to dispute.

## CHAPTER THIRD

LISA and Valerie and all that concerned them vanished from Lynneth's mind when, returning to the hotel, she found there a letter from Geoffrey. But in spite of its lover-like ardour it disappointed her bitterly. For it postponed the date of his home-coming.

"I'll be finished with the 'personally conducted' in three more days," he wrote, "for which the gods be thanked! But, dearest heart, I've got to make a little side trip into Arizona. There's a small aerodrome tucked away on the edge of the desert, where they're trying out a new engine very much on the quiet. I'm to give it the once over, and—they hope!—my valuable endorsement. Are you duly impressed, my lady, with your husband's importance? Only the truth is said husband feels like condemning all planes to destruction and all inventors to everlasting perdition. But we'll have to try to forgive the wretched things, since they're going to provide us with plenty of cake and jam as well as butter on our bread!

"Just how long this confounded jaunt is going to take I haven't the ghost of an idea, but 'It is an order!' as Rod Malvin always says. And that reminds me. One of the letters you forwarded was from him. He's sailing the last of the month, and may land in New York before I get back from this beastly trip. If he does, he'll probably come straight up to the hotel. I sent him the address, and told him I'd meet him in New York before I knew anything about this extra job. I hate it, but I must admit it's going to be a good thing for me professionally. And once it's over I'll come rushing back to you as fast as the fastest train can bring me, and

then, sweetheart mine, I'll have you in my arms again, and nothing else will matter the least little bit."

It was a very long letter, page after page covered with small firm writing, legible as print. His wish that she should know and see all he knew and saw, shone through every line of it, and with the wish his impatience and his longing.

Sitting alone on the low couch by the window where they had sat together, looking at those lights across the water he so loved to watch, she read the many closely written sheets over and over again. Then as at last she folded them away, while memory repeated the words he had written, there came to her, swiftly, insidiously, an overpowering consciousness of his presence there beside her. . . .

It seemed as if she had but to turn her head to see him standing looking down at her with that absorbed gaze she knew so well. And while her whole being thrilled, the familiar sense of security, of perfect trust, enfolded her anew.

The insistent clamour of the telephone brought her to her feet, startled as one suddenly roused from profound slumber. Full realization of the matter-of-fact came to her only with the sound of Madge Ayres' voice over the wire.

"Hello!—Oh, hello, Lynneth! I called up to tell you I've just had a telegram from Joan. She'll be back next week."

"Good! I'm ever so glad! Where is she?"

"The telegram was sent from some little town in Ohio. What do you suppose she could have been doing out there?"

"I haven't a notion. Anyway, the great thing is, she's coming back."

"Yes, on Thursday. It's all too awfully funny! What do you think could have taken her out there?"



She never acted so—so queerly before. I can't make it out at all!"

"Nor I. Perhaps she'll explain when she gets back."

"Wouldn't it be funny if there was a man in the case, after all? It would be a mighty good joke on me if both you and Joan went off and got married and left me whistling to keep my courage up!"

There were times when Madge rubbed Lynneth the wrong way, and the tone in which that last speech was uttered rasped her. Justice made her admit it was because of her knowledge. She couldn't laugh over Joan's spinsterhood, not with the memory of Joan's bitter words in her mind; "There's something wrong with me, something—lacking." . . . "The grey sisterhood of the unwanted."

She said: "I'll try to see you in a day or two. We must have some sort of celebration for Joan."

Madge felt snubbed. She didn't know why, being innocent of intentional offense. Her tone turned chilly; "Very well. I'll see what I can do. Good-by!"

Lynneth was aware of the chill. Her thought as she rang off was that she must do something to make up again with Madge.

Geoffrey's note, thrust into the bosom of her gown, rustled against her breast. She put it to her cheek; and Madge and Joan followed Lisa and Valerie into oblivion.

But a promise is a promise, and after a morning spent in writing to Geoffrey, Lynneth decided to walk across the Park to Lisa's apartment on the East Side. There was a mail box in the hotel foyer, and she stopped beside it to post her letter with the air of detachment she had learned to assume for the protection of her privacy.

Now that September was nearly gone, many of the habitual residents of the hotel were returning, giving

Lynneth her first glimpse of the well-to-do female strays, who having no acquaintances in New York and nothing much to do, try to become acquainted with their fellow lodgers, and armed with knitting or "fancy work" hang about the public rooms on the chance of finding some one with whom to gossip. The ice once broken, they drop in on one another at all hours, relating their own most intimate affairs as well as those of their friends and families, with frequent reversions to their one inexhaustible topic—complaints about the food.

Lynneth and her concerns, who she was, what she was, where she came from and what she was doing, had provided a subject for discussion they had chewed and worried and returned to again and again. Several had endeavoured to "get to know her," but Lynneth, when she chose, could be the most unapproachable of the unapproachable, and diamonds and automobiles did not impress her in the very least. Give these women a "Good morning" in the elevator, and they would take an afternoon in your apartment, talking clothes, servants, operations, obstetrics and scandal.

Her cultivated unawareness of their existence was entirely genuine on this particular afternoon. Her thoughts were of Geoffrey—when weren't they?—and she was doing her best to turn some of them to Lisa, Valerie, and the coming interview. She didn't succeed very well, and found herself at the door of Lisa's apartment without a definite plan of any kind.

The drawing-room into which she was presently shown laid forcible hold on her attention. Whatever else one might think of it, one must admit that it was arresting.

The walls were panelled in ebony and dull black silk; the carpet and hangings were of black velvet. The ebony furniture was upholstered in black silk brocade, and the same material covered the cushions piled on the

long sofa. In one corner a small fountain sent a slender jet of water high into the air, to fall, hissing softly, back into a white marble basin—glaringly white against its sombre background. In another was a large aquarium through whose cloudy water swam small, goblin-like fish, with strange goggle eyes. The stagnant, airless atmosphere was heavy with the fumes of burning incense, placed before a large, bestial figure of the horrible Indian goddess Kali which, carved out of teak and standing on a teak pedestal, was the presiding genius of the room. The only spots of colour were the dull green weeds amid which the fishes swam, some leprous-looking orchids, and the gaudy cover of a book lying face downwards on the sofa. Lynneth glanced at the title, and knew it for the translation of a foreign novel, much condemned for its deliberate lewdness. Evidently, Lisa had lost none of her taste for the erotic.

What a sickening place it was! Redolent of the abnormal, of a cultivated fungus-growth of unclean interests, unclean emotions. Lynneth longed to fling open the thickly curtained windows, to let in a flood of air and sunlight. . . .

The black velvet curtain screening a doorway opened, and closed again behind Lisa.

Her eyes grown accustomed to the dim light, Lynneth scrutinized the other woman curiously. Lisa was almost as arresting as her drawing-room, and in much the same way. She wore a make-up insolent in its glaring artificiality of dead-white liquid powder coating face and neck, of shaped and darkened eyebrows and lashes, beneath which her pale eyes looked glassy. Her mouth was smeared with crimson, her lustreless hair had been dyed with henna. The green of the long jade ear-rings hanging from her scrupulously concealed ears was repeated in her transparent batik tea-gown, insolent too in its revelation of the extreme scantiness of her clothing.



She smiled; but she did not offer her hand.

"Sit down," she remarked indifferently, motioning Lynneth to a chair, and carefully disposing her own green draperies amid the black brocade cushions of the sofa. "Sit down. How do you like my room?" Then re-arranging the beaded tassels of her girdle; "No polite lying, please! You don't like it, do you?"

"I think it's horrible!" Lynneth blushed at her own frankness. Instinct had made repudiation imperative.

Lisa's pallid eyes wandered slowly around. "I suppose it is," she said with feline complacency. "I hope it is! I meant it to be. At least, it isn't commonplace!"

"No. It certainly isn't commonplace." Lynneth's assent was emphatic.

"I'll show you the rest of the apartment before you go. I think you'll like it almost as much as this!"

The remark scarcely admitted of any reply. Lynneth did not attempt to make one. The heavy atmosphere stifled her, the image of Kali grinned at her obscenely. And Lisa was a part of it all, a part of this abhorrent place she had created. . . .

"You asked me to come here." It was neither a question nor a statement, but a demand. She wanted to finish with what had been thrust upon her, to finish, and escape.

"Yes. Yes, I did. You'd like to know my reason." Lisa's smile was no less metallic than her voice. It touched only her lips, never reaching her eyes. "But I'm not going to tell you. Not my real one. Do I puzzle you, generally?" Again the feline complacency.

"When I——" Lynneth caught herself up.

"When you think of me at all!" Lisa's dryness had an element of chagrin. "I don't bulk very large in your cosmos, do I? Still, you're a woman. After what you saw and heard the day I was married, you must have wondered?"

"I did!" Subtle inflections filled the two words with implications.

"You couldn't understand my going on with it, could you?" Lisa pressed the point, her egotism dominant. She would rather be loathed than ignored.

"No; I couldn't." If Lisa wanted frankness she should have it, unvarnished and unadorned.

"I'll tell you." As Lisa moved, making herself more comfortable among the pillows, she touched the gaudily bound novel. Glancing at it, she smiled again. At last, she held Lynneth's attention.

"I was curious—horribly curious." She lingered a little on the phrase. "I'd read a lot; you remember? But reading wasn't enough. Not for me. I was—*horribly* curious. Lots of girls are. I had to know. I'd have paid almost any price for—knowledge. I bought it as cheaply as I could!" She flung out her bare arms in a restless gesture; her greedy eyes burned. "I had to know!" she repeated.

"You married for that?" Lynneth exclaimed incredulously.

"Mostly. There were other reasons, of course. I couldn't" — again she looked about the room — "I couldn't have done this sort of thing in Washington Square—not on the North Side! And in spite of all the 'modernist' talk, for women—young women—of our class, the only way to be free without becoming more or less—well, *déclassée*, is to get married."

Lynneth's sensitive lips were a little compressed. She did not want these confidences which were being forced upon her. But having confidences forced upon her was something to which she had grown accustomed. She drew them as a magnet does iron.

"There's almost nothing," Lisa went on, "there's almost nothing you can't do if you're married, and reasonably careful. It's as foolish to run risks as it is to let

what old fogies call 'morals' stand in your way. I never"—the greedy, snatching look was in her eyes—"I never let them stand in mine!"

"Haven't we wandered pretty far from the point?" It was Lynneth now who spoke dryly. "My impression is that we weren't to discuss morality versus expediency, but simply—Valerie!"

A moment's silence. Then; "I wish you liked me!" Lisa exclaimed irrelevantly.

Lynneth felt niggardly before that implicit demand. She liked to give, and to give with both hands. "I'd like you better if you'd let Valerie go!" she exclaimed.

"I will!" Lisa sat up suddenly, biting out the words.

"Good! I'm so glad! You'll give her back the letter?"

What Lynneth did, she did thoroughly. But though her tone was confident, she expected Lisa to temporize. Which Lisa straightway proceeded to do.

"I didn't say that! I must keep it for—oh well, for my own protection. Valerie's fancy for this Larford man won't last long. And she's not particularly fond of me!"

Lynneth knew Lisa was lying. Placed beside her remarks of a minute or two before, the statement was cynical in its unblushing falsity. But accusation would be worse than foolish. She too temporized now, her grey gaze on the colourless eyes over which the lashes, heavy with blackening, flickered and dropped.

"I don't believe she'd ever——"

"Oh, wouldn't she!" Lisa interrupted. "I'd never dream of trusting her. But *I* keep *my* word." Emphasizing each separate syllable, she added: "You can tell her, I promise not to interfere with her marriage."

"You'd better tell her so yourself!" There was nothing of gratification in Lynneth's tone. Lisa had given a promise, and Lisa kept her promises. So much grace at least was hers! But the pale eyes held a look of



furtive triumph that filled her with distrust, even while she scolded herself for being distrustful.

"No; I'd rather it would come from you. After all, I'm doing it on your account, partly! You're the only person I feel safe with. Safe, that is, to say what I please. It's a strain, sometimes, living up to this"—her gesture swept the room—"though it is a relief after North Washington Square!"

"Why not modify it, then? There's a good deal of lee-way between North Washington Square, and"—Lynneth glanced at the grotesque idol—"and Kali!"

"For you. Not for me." Again Lisa's egotism was demanding attention, no matter how reluctantly given. She went on with gloating eagerness: "In the between-ground, I'd be a nobody. Kali makes me a personality. People love to talk! I" —she smiled again, that smile of the lips her eyes denied—"I give them something to talk about!"

Lynneth rose. "I must go now," she said hastily. "I want to stop in at the shop and see Mrs. Ayres before closing-time."

Lisa started to speak, glanced at the tiny enamelled watch on her wrist, and changed her mind. Slipping from the sofa with a slithering of green draperies; "You'll tell Valerie?" she said. "And you'll come again?"

Refusal had somehow become impossible. Unwillingly Lynneth agreed. "Yes; I'll write to Valerie."

"And you'll come again?" Lisa repeated, a veiled mockery in her voice.

Lynneth's eyes met hers with something of distrust, but more of pity. "Who knows?"

As she spoke, the door behind her opened. Phil Armytage came in. And with him, Danvers Calhoun.

Since she had left New York for West Hillsdale, they had not met. She had written him immediately after

her engagement, and received a reply which was a model of dignified resignation.

His greeting was eager, Phil's perfunctory. They all shook hands, exchanging the usual civilities. Then Calhoun remarked pleasantly:

"When Phil said you'd come up to town, Mrs. Armytage, I told him he must let me drop in, just for a few minutes. I've been here most of the summer, and it seems ages since I've had a glimpse of either of you!" He looked sadly, not at Lisa, but at Lynneth.

Lisa caught the look. "How very flattering—to us!" she exclaimed with emphasized sarcasm. And added; "When was it we last saw one another? Do you remember?"

Calhoun was annoyed. And he had failed to secure from Phil the invitation to the mountains for which he had been fishing. Suddenly he decided to try an experiment, since apparently he had little to lose.

"Oh, I've a good memory!" he declared. "That's one thing I can say for myself. The last time I saw you was at the Demarests' dinner, and the last time I saw Phil was the day I met him having tea with your sister down at 'The Fountain,' last spring. Did you find the taxi you wanted, Phil? 'The Fountain's' so dreadfully out of the way!"

Silence. Lynneth felt as if caterpillars were crawling over her bare skin. She recalled the times she had seen Phil and Valerie together. She had wondered then if Lisa knew. . . . And the promise Lisa had just made?

Lisa smiled. Her voice was like a file across the silence; "Phil and Valerie share a passion—for out-of-the-way tea rooms. They're always making discoveries. I've promised to go with them some day, and I suppose I'll have to do it. I—keep my promises!"

Her eyes were on Lynneth's. But that reassurance, that repeated, "I keep my promises!" Was it really a reassurance? Or was it—a threat?

Automatically, Lynne took her leave. Lisa went with her to the door, and there spoke quickly, words meant for her alone; "Tell Valerie I won't interfere with her marriage."

Her doubt had been seen, and answered. Yet it remained.

Once more in the street, she drew a long breath. Filled with dust and automobile smoke though it was, the outside air seemed clean!

At the bookshop she found Madge busy with an important customer, and so went away, agreeing to return within a day or two. As she walked briskly homewards, up the Avenue and through the Park—Geoffrey was an inveterate walker, and she was determined not to get out of practice—thinking of the letter to him she meant to begin that evening, other ideas came straying into her mind, thoughts of the women whose lives had touched her own.

There was Madge, who looked upon love as a thing of moonshine and roses, fading swiftly and inevitably. Then came Valerie whose love Lisa was probably quite right in calling a fancy, an infatuation. And Lisa herself, who had used her husband as a stepping-stone to freedom. . . .

These, the married women! And apart from them stood solitary Joan of the grey sisterhood whose members denied their order——

Her own happiness seemed almost a thing to fear.



## CHAPTER FOURTH

LYNNETH wrote to Valerie, repeating Lisa's promise, while underscoring Lisa's refusal to part with the perilous letter. Then having done her best in this affair which was very surely none of hers, she gladly ejected it from her mind

She was using some of her tiny capital for the purchase of a modest trousseau, which just because it was so modest, required very careful planning. It must be completed before Geoffrey returned, and a telegram had told her that his return was now a matter of only a few days. Her heart sang as she checked them off on the calendar, simply for the childish pleasure of scratching them out, and noted how small a number were left. Had it not been for the side trip to inspect the new aeroplane motor, he would be with her now! But regrets were futile, and his telegram assured her that he was to start on his homeward way this very evening.

Geoffrey was coming!

No wonder the sky was so blue and the air so clear, no wonder the river rippled and sparkled in the sunshine! Her happiness was so abundant, some of it must have spilled over, and that was why the little white boats bobbed so gayly at their moorings and all the world seemed full of laughter!

Geoffrey was coming!

The words were a song, a lilt, poetry incarnate. Geoffrey was coming!

They had arranged that she should write to the Junction, where he would be obliged to change cars, waiting a couple of hours for the east-bound train. Her pen

rushed over the paper, but it couldn't keep pace with her flying thoughts. And even at their best, mere words couldn't express a minute fraction of her love for him, not if she had an ocean of ink, and all the trees in all the forests felled for paper! But he knew, he understood. What need had they of words, save perhaps for the lesser things of life, who were one, one now, and for all time!

Yet the joy of giving with eyes and lips and clinging arms being temporarily denied her, she welcomed the secondary delight of pouring out her over-full heart to him, there on the insentient paper.

The letter finished, she did not close it. No time would be gained by posting it now, and she would like to add a line or two after seeing Madge that afternoon. First she would shop for stockings to match the daffodil-yellow gown—she did so hope he'd like it!

Seventy-two hours more! Then—their second honeymoon. And they would never be separated again. She hoped she had been brave. She had tried hard not to worry or mope. But she couldn't, she *couldn't* go through it again! Nor could he. It was for both of them worse than being maimed, to be apart even for a little while.

After lunch she went down Riverside Drive and across Fifth Avenue, riding on top of a bus. It was one of those early autumn days when, though the sun is still warm, there is a tang to the air. Swiftly racing white clouds which held no threat of storm, sent splendid purple shadows swooping magnificently over the river and down upon the Palisades on the opposite shore. A fleet of grey battleships, flying the beautiful flag of the United States, lay drawn up in two long, imposing lines, while bustling little power-boats flitted back and forth between them and the various landing stages.

From the front seat of the lurching vehicle Lynne absorbed the scene with eager eyes, tucking its details

away in her memory until she could write about them to Geoffrey. She couldn't fully enjoy anything, until she had shared her enjoyment with him. Phrases shaped themselves in her thoughts; "The sky was like a great blue diamond, Geoff. And the clouds were puffs of smoke. They reminded me of the mists that used to steam up from the valley——"

Fifth Avenue was all astir with that renewal of activity which comes each autumn. Everything seemed fresh and gay and hopeful, and Lynneth loved it all. She could have laughed aloud from sheer delight in living. With the warm current of her rich and ardent youth speeding through her veins, with the blue sky and the glad sunlight shining in her very soul, crowned with a love that transcended all her dreams, her pulses throbbed to the song in her heart. Geoffrey was coming!

When she reached the stately white shop which was her destination, she made her purchases joyfully, comparing tints and shades and textures with a happy, eager intentness. Looking her best had become a matter of tremendous importance now, when looking her best meant pleasing Geoffrey!

Her errands finished, she walked up to the bookshop, and found Madge tidying disordered shelves.

"Not another word have I had from Joan," she grumbled. "I don't know whether she's coming tomorrow, or the next day or the day after! She didn't give me any address, so I can't telegraph. I must say I think she's showing mighty little consideration! It isn't,"—she reverted to the expression Lynneth had used—"it isn't a bit like Joan!"

"I haven't heard from her at all!" Lynneth pouted, half in fun. "I don't believe she even knows I'm married!"

"Gracious heaven! To think of any one's being ig-



norant of that world-shaking event!" There was a tincture of envy in Madge's ridicule. She liked Lynneth, and would have been sorry had any serious mischance befallen her. But she was not one of those rare people who can rejoice whole-heartedly in the happiness of some one else. And it really didn't seem fair that Lynneth should have *everything*!

Lynneth laughed gleefully. It was easier for her to laugh than to, this day! "Am I as absurd as all that? Goodness! And I've tried so hard to act like a staid and accustomed matron!"

"You're a dear, and I'm a cat! Come into the office and have some tea. . . . I got hold of Mrs. O'Flaherty—you remember her, don't you?—and set her to work cleaning the apartment. Then I thought tomorrow morning you and I might run over there and fix the place up a bit and make it look nice and homey. You'll come?"

"Of course, I will! Mrs. O'Flaherty puts every chair flat against the wall and leaves her cleaning rags all over the place."

"Invariably! And knocks every picture crooked."

So they chatted on, and it was all very pleasant, and very commonplace. The hours before Geoffrey came must be disposed of somehow!

Madge persuaded Lynneth to dine with her at one of the tea rooms they had often gone to, where the waitresses all knew them, and the plump proprietress herself beamed upon them, and wished Lynneth happiness. It was half-past eight, and after, when she got back to the hotel. As she alighted from the bus, a newsboy offered her the last of his evening papers, and she bought it, giving the child a quarter and refusing change with a smile. It was a way of sharing her gladness!

The hotel lobby was ablaze with light. Men and women crowded the lounge, lolling on chairs and sofas,

steeped in after-dinner torpor. Going to the desk for her key, she noticed a very tall, very lean man in evening dress, who, standing with his back towards her, was evidently asking some question of the clerk. That the question concerned herself was proved when, an instant later, the latter caught sight of her, and she heard him say; "Here's Mrs. Tressel now!"

The tall man swung sharply about. He had, Lynneth thought, the brightest blue eyes she'd ever seen, eyes the brighter and bluer because of their contrast with his skin, bronzed to an almost Arabian darkness. He was, apparently, somewhere in the middle forties. His brown hair showed grey at the temples; there were net-works of fine lines around his eyes and at the corners of his large, straight-cut mouth; two almost perpendicular wrinkles divided his heavy eyebrows. He had a fined-down look, the thoroughbred's indescribable, unconscious air of race. Lynneth's instinctive thought was that here was a man to be relied upon in a panic. She was confident of his identity before he said, a little stiffly, with quick speech and unmistakable accent:

"Mrs. Tressel? I'm Roderick Malvin. Perhaps Tressel told you——?"

Lynneth gave him her hand, and with it her prettiest, friendliest smile. She had long ago made up her mind to like Colonel Sir Roderick Malvin, who "ought to have had the Victoria Cross, and never got a darn thing!" Now the liking had come, instantly and without effort.

"He's told me a great deal about you!" she exclaimed cordially. "And I—I'm ever so glad to see you. Geoffrey was detained—he won't be back for two days yet—but he wrote me you might come."

From his six feet three, Malvin looked down on her gravely. His somewhat austere face softened; "Then you'll let me tell you what pleasure it gave me to hear

of his great good fortune, and wish you every happiness?"

"Thank you." She paused, meeting his swift straight look with one as swift, as straight. "There's a sort of loggia on the hotel roof, where people sit in the evenings to watch the boats on the river. Suppose we go up there—and talk?"

His probing look relaxed, became grateful. He had seen the matrimonial knife sever the bonds of more than a few masculine friendships. Now he dismissed his apprehensions. He would not lose Geoffrey because of any petty jealousy on the part of Geoffrey's wife.

Lynneth, already moving towards the elevator, stopped suddenly. "Wait a minute, please! I might as well get my key now."

As she spoke, and turned, the folded newspaper, tucked forgotten under her left arm, slipped and fell to the floor. In falling, it opened, showing the headlines.

Malvin stooped for it. And those headlines screamed at him. . . .

He caught up the paper, crushing it together. But she had seen his face.

The lights reeled, spinning about her. His words reached her from a distance, out of an immense void.

"Mrs. Tressel!—Please—oh, please——!"

She did not know that she had laid hold of the paper; she did not know that her voice was toneless, perfectly composed.

"Give it to me," she said.

Already people were staring at them, whispering curiously to one another. Somewhere a door slammed. . . .

He could only yield. Yield with misery in his heart for her coming pain. She took the newspaper from him. But before she saw them, she was all but sure of the headlines' message;



"Famous Aviator Killed. Geoffrey Tressel Crashes To His Death In Aeroplane Accident."

Darkness closed round her. Her two hands gripped the paper, twisting, crushing, tearing.

Suddenly they relaxed. The fragments fluttered to the floor. She stood rigid, staring straight before her, staring, staring into the darkness. . . .

BOOK V  
STUYVESANT PARK





## BOOK V

### STUYVESANT PARK

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#### CHAPTER FIRST

THROUGH the days and weeks and months that followed, Lynneth lived enveloped in a grey mist of pain. Only her suffering seemed real to her. Beyond the grey mist were illusions, colourless shadow-shapes of men and women who moved about, and talked, and pretended to be actually existing, actually alive—how could they be alive, when Geoffrey was dead?

He who was so vital, so radiant with youth and energy, loving life and living, was dead. God had let him die!

There were times when she couldn't believe that he was never coming back to her. It wasn't possible, it wasn't even thinkable! It must, it *must* be only a dream, from which she would presently awake to feel his arms about her. And then realization closed pitilessly upon her, and crushed her down to despair.

Memories of that last day haunted her. They made her feel culpable, almost guilty. She had shopped and laughed and chatted, unknowing, unfeeling! How could she *not* have known? It had been like any other day to her—the day Geoffrey died!

After the shock of great and sudden sorrow, most of us experience this feeling which was Lynneth's, this dazed surprise that everything should have been just as usual in those last hours before It happened. How

could we have gone on, doing the usual things in the usual way, insensitive to what was coming?

With no consciousness whatever of foreboding, she had laughed, been happy on the day he left her! Left her completely.

For the sense of his spiritual presence she had often known while he was on his western trip, was gone. Only emptiness remained. And she wanted him, wanted him with every drop of her blood, every pulse of her brain, every beat of her heart.

If he could come back to her, just for an hour! If she could speak to him once, just once more! His dear voice, his strong clasp, his quick glancing smile—she craved them all. She wanted him back as he had been, her human, flesh and blood Geoffrey. . . .

And she had only despair, and the agony of loss.

With bruised and bleeding hands she beat upon the unyielding Gates of Death.

And no ray of light came through. And faith was dead, and hope lost in the night that was black around her.

Over her life the fire had passed, leaving it burned and charred, useless and desolate as that old house upon the mountain-top.

Yet after the first few days she appeared quite calm, perfectly composed and self-possessed. She had no easy tears. And she never let any one see her, racked with the terrible sobbing that brought no relief.

She was living with Joan in the little apartment on Stuyvesant Park, exactly as they had planned—was it centuries ago? Joan had come to her at once, and taken her there, while Roderick Malvin had gone West, brought back Geoffrey's body, and in consultation with Joan, made all the necessary arrangements, sparing Lynneth as much as possible. It was from Malvin that she presently learned how Geoffrey died.

With another aviator, John Sanderson, he had made a trial flight to test the new motor. A high wind sprang up, engine trouble developed, they were driven very far out of their course. In trying to make a forced landing, they crashed. And when Sanderson, who had escaped with a broken arm and a few bruises, succeeded in freeing himself from the wreckage, Geoffrey was dead.

How those first few months passed, Lynneth never knew. All else was blurred, blotted out by pain. There were only darkness, hopelessness. A frenzy of rebellion. And despair.

It had been easy to have faith, easy to believe in a beneficent God, while Geoffrey was alive! Now every word of would-be comfort seemed senseless, trivial, an uncomprehending mockery. . . .

His few personal possessions, his books and medals, had been given her, and with his letters, were what she valued most on earth. They were all she had left.

While Malvin was West, Calhoun had taken charge of Lynneth's financial affairs, doing what was necessary to settle up Geoffrey Tressel's small estate, and secure for her the tiny pension to which she was entitled. Mr. Hetherington had suggested to his wife that perhaps it would be advisable for him to offer his services, but while he talked, Calhoun acted. Lynneth listened to what he told her, signed papers, smiled her thanks. To do him justice, he had been honestly shocked by the tragedy, but her composure soon convinced him that she could not have cared a great deal for the dead man. Well, she was still very young, and before long would forget, and be ready to marry again. What else could you expect of a widow still in the twenties? His chance would come! But of course such things couldn't be spoken of yet.

Lucky for him, though, that he had been able to get her affairs into his hands before Ashby Lawrence re-



turned from Italy! It was bad enough to have that man Malvin always in the way! Easy to see what *he* was after!

Roderick Malvin was often to be found in the apartment on Stuyvesant Park, where he was doubly welcome, welcome for his own sake, and yet more because he, better than any one else, could talk to Lynne about Geoffrey. The need for prompt action following Geoffrey's sudden death had propelled him on to a footing of intimacy, and he could tell her little things, incidents even she did not know. She cherished every tiniest scrap of such information, although it made her, in a way, jealous of this friend who had known Geoffrey before she did! When Ashby Lawrence returned, he too was able to add to her store, and of him too she was jealous, though he had not seen so much of Geoffrey, not been so much his friend. And yet, for the very reason that Geoffrey had cared for both these men, she cared for them too.

Her grief was selfish, as all great sorrow is at its beginning. Only as one becomes used to pain does one learn to bear it bravely, perhaps to use it as an instrument. With the rallying from shock, the test of character comes. The test which must be met and undergone—alone.

It was Joan's need which presently flashed red, flaring like a danger signal through the grey mist enshrouding Lynne.

## CHAPTER SECOND

THE autumn had passed. Winter went by, and spring. Summer had come again. It was on a breathless day in August, one of those exhausting New York days when an orange-coloured sun glares through a sticky yellow fog, when every footstep shows on the soft and smelly asphalt, and the heat beats pitilessly back from stone and concrete, that Ashby Lawrence, passing through town on his way to Bar Harbor, came into the little office behind the shop where Lynneth was busy with a sheaf of accounts. For though Joan protested, Lynneth had insisted on going back to work. She couldn't live on her income and she had refused, civilly but quite decidedly, the assistance offered by Mrs. Hetherington.

She did her work as well as ever, made as few mistakes. Her personality seemed divided; there was the Lynneth who was calm and efficient, who when you spoke to her made answer in a still tone oddly devoid of inflections, a machine without, apparently, one trace of human feeling; and there was that other Lynneth, who sat apart behind the grey veil, watching the activities of the first with a kind of dull, incurious wonder. . . .

"Busy?" Lawrence enquired, casually, but with a resolve taken.

She swung around in her chair and looked up at him, the big grey eyes seeming bigger and darker than ever in the small pale face, so white above the black frock.

"I've just finished. Will you be in town long?"

"I'm leaving tonight. Too hot here for me!" He glanced over his shoulder, hesitated, then went and closed the door before he drew the single cane-bottomed

chair closer to the desk, and said in a lower tone; "I've just been talking to Joan. Have you—er—noticed Joan?"

He was appealing to the old Lynneth, the Lynneth who was a complete, not a divided personality. But it was the insentient machine that replied; "Joan? No. What about Joan?"

He should, during all these months, have become used to that still, inflectionless tone. But he hadn't. It hurt him, and he spoke sharply, with a wilful exaggeration; "You don't mean to say you haven't noticed that she's unhappy—wretchedly unhappy?"

"No; I haven't——"

Lynneth's voice had quickened a little. For the first time, emotion faintly coloured it. Though her grief had for so many months overlaid and obliterated every other feeling, she cared very deeply for Joan. Now that affection stirred, slowly fighting its way upward through the bitter waters beneath which it had been submerged.

"She hasn't been herself for a long time. Didn't she ever tell you where she went last summer, when she acted so queerly?"

Lynneth winced. Last summer——!

Then she braced herself; "No; never."

"I was in hopes she had." Lawrence was intentionally pressing the point. "You've always been closer to her than any one else! Couldn't you say something to her?"

Lynneth shook her head. She could no more have tried to force Joan's confidence than, once given, she could have betrayed it.

"I'm afraid not. If she doesn't want to tell me——"

She left it there, and Lawrence changed the subject. He was satisfied that he had got a message through to the Lynneth who sat apart, the Lynneth who was not an automaton. He had meant to rouse her from her trance of sorrow. What he had done was to make preparation for the moment when the long disconnected coördination



between eyes and heart and brain snapped suddenly into place at the unexpected sight of Joan's face, twisted with pain. . . .

Coming home one Saturday afternoon a little earlier than usual from one of those short motor runs upon which Roderick Malvin often insisted on taking her, Lynneth remembered an article she had meant to read, Believing her friend still at the publishing house where she had had an appointment, she went to look for the morning paper in Joan's sitting room, the door of which was partly open.

In a big easy chair Joan sat, crouching forward, her head on her folded arms. She lifted it suddenly. Their eyes met.

Then for the first time since the headlines had shrieked to her of Geoffrey's death, Lynneth broke away from her sorrow. It was of Joan and Joan only that she thought as she flung herself upon her knees at the other's side, and caught the long, thin hands in both her own.

"Joan!" she cried. "What's the matter, dear? Are you ill? What's the matter, Joan?"

But quick as she had been, Joan's self-mastery was even quicker. She could force a smile to her lips—but she couldn't hide those tell-tale marks on her hands, where the nails had been driven into the palms.

"Why, there's nothing the matter!" she said. "It's all right, Lynn, dear. Get up."

They had never been demonstrative in their affection for each other, these two. But now Lynneth bent, and kissed the cold hands. Her eyes questioned. And at last;

"There is something wrong, Joan," she replied firmly. "When you went away—last summer—and didn't tell any one——?"

That last phrase was a godsend to Joan. It showed her a way of satisfying Lynneth; speaking the truth, but not that truth it would lacerate her pride to confess.

"Didn't want to worry you, Lynn. You couldn't have done anything. Afterwards, when it was all over, it didn't seem worth gabbling about. But—oh, well, I was ill. Had been ill a long time."

"Was that why you went away?"

Joan nodded. "Went to the hospital at Rochester. They operated on me there."

"Operated——? Oh, Joan! And you never told me!"

"What for? Only have worried you. All my life, I——" She stopped short. She would not say, "All my life I've gone through things alone." That might sound like a bid for sympathy! She went on; "I'm all right now."

"Oh, Joan dear, if I'd only known!" Lynneth's voice shook. This going away to bear what must be borne, to bear it in silence and alone was, to use her own phrase, so like Joan! It was an instinct she thoroughly understood, whose own tears no one ever saw. Slowly she added; "Had it been—often—very bad?"

"Wasn't exactly amusing!"

Dozens of little things, incidents half-forgotten, came crowding into Lynneth's mind. Dominant among them, that familiar gesture, the leap of Joan's hand to hide her mouth. But today, since it was all over——?

"You're sure you're all right, Joan?" she remorsefully insisted. "When I came in just now——" She regretted those last words almost before they were spoken.

Joan flinched, hesitating an instant. She had so much wanted not to lie! "Oh, that was nothing!" she answered hastily. "The—the place where they cut hurts sometimes. It'll stop soon."

Then Lynneth knew she had been told only part of the truth. No physical pain had ever brought that look of tortured rebellion into Joan's eyes! She remembered the revelation made long ago. And she asked no more questions.

But alone in her own room that night, she took her one photograph of Geoffrey and set it before her, speaking to it softly, as she had so often done, in pitiful endeavour to reach across the void and bring back the consciousness of his living presence.

"Geoff, dearest," she whispered, "I'm ashamed of myself—dreadfully ashamed! I've been a selfish little beast. I never was one-half as big and generous as you thought, dear heart, but I'm going to be better. I had such a lot of happiness!—more than most women ever have. And I haven't thought of anything, but how I missed you and wanted you—oh, Geoff dear, can't you come back to me, just for a minute? Only a minute! I can't bear it, Geoff, I can't, I *can't*——!"

The dreadful dry sobbing seemed shaking her to pieces. But this time she did not let it have its way. She fought it, she thrust it down. And she took the photograph, and cradled it against her cheek, and whispered to it. . . .

And the pictured face that was so terribly alive never altered for all her pleading.

Yet as she stood there alone, whispering over and over again; "I won't be so selfish any more, Geoff dear. It's like disappointing you; even—even cheating you! I'll try—oh, I promise you I'll try hard to do and be all you'd want! I'll try to be strong and brave and cheerful, and to help Joan. I know you'd want me to do all I can for Joan, dear heart! I'm sure you would," there came to her, subtly, faintly, very, very faintly, a shadowy, all but imperceptible awareness of Geoffrey. Not as with her, not as near to her or conscious of her, but as somewhere, somehow, *being*. . . .

An instant, a breath, and it was gone. Gone so completely she came close to doubting whether it had ever existed at all. Her very longing for its reality made her tell herself it was only imagination. Yet it had left her



with a feeble, flickering gleam, not of hope precisely, but of something to hope for.

Imaginary or not, it had brought courage. By an effort of will, of memory, she might sometime be able to recall it. And if she could! If she only could! . . .

## CHAPTER THIRD

ALMOST from the first, Lynneth had achieved an external self-control. But the very detachment of personality which made such control possible, had turned it into a frozen rigidity. Then with her response to Joan's need had come a new warm current, breaking up the ice.

Her aching sense of loss was no less poignant, her grief no less profound; yet the black despair had lightened a little. She accused herself of weakness, scolded herself for allowing her pain to possess her so absolutely.

Geoffrey, her flesh and blood Geoffrey, was gone. But he had believed in the survival of personality, after the death of the body. . . .

If only she could feel again, as she had felt during her brief moment of awareness, that this belief of his was completely, splendidly true! With all the ardent intensity her gentleness concealed, she now set resolutely to work to reshape her life. She had one aim in view, and one only; to win again to the consciousness of him as somewhere, somehow, *being*.

She read his books over and over again; they might help her to think his thoughts. Every interest that had been his, she followed as closely and as far as she could. Every idea, every opinion he had expressed, she strove to recall. In the courage that had been his she struggled to find, and little by little did find, courage for herself. All that was in her of power and of force was centred on the one effort, the one desire—to divine what Geoffrey would have wanted her to do, and do it; to divine what he would have wanted her to be, and be it; and so, through love and an active, encouraged memory love

would not allow time to atrophy, to spin a thread across the Great Abyss.

In this concentration of effort, month after month went by, almost unheeded. And seldom at first, then less rarely though never often, came those blessed moments of awareness. But not that consciousness of Geoffrey's unseen presence she had known more than once while he was alive. Always he seemed far away, infinitely beyond her reach. Try as she might to bring him to her, he never came.

But the greater inward strength, the thought of having something to work for, were reflected in her physical self, and of course misinterpreted by those who saw them. Malvin, whom she now regarded very much as the big brother she had never had, congratulated himself that the motoring he had almost forced upon her had done something, if only a very little, to help. Geoff, dear old fellow, was the last man to have wanted any one to be unhappy forever on his account! He had cared for Geoff more than for any of his other friends, and he'd have done his best for Geoff's widow even if he hadn't liked her. Nowhere in the United States did he feel so much at home as in the little apartment on Stuyvesant Park, with Lynneth Tressel, and—and Miss Hilary!

Danvers Calhoun marked the change with a mixture of satisfaction and apprehension. He thought she was "getting over" Tressel's death, as was to be expected. Why, the man had been dead more than a year! What worried him was a fear that the getting over might be the result, less of beneficent time than of the presence of Roderick Malvin. Friendship between man and woman being something in which he hadn't a particle of faith, her relations with the Englishman made him decidedly uneasy. They also increased her desirability. After a while, he decided to try to extract some information from Joan Hilary.



He found her alone one Sunday afternoon, in the sitting room fronting on the little park. She shook hands cordially.

"Sit down! Lynneth's out for a walk, but she'll be back soon, and then we'll have tea. You'll wait, won't you?"

"Yes, of course. I brought some papers for her. Don't you think she's been looking better lately? It seems to me she's got more interest in things—and in people."

"She does seem rather more alive."

Joan's tortoise-shell rimmed eyeglasses tapped the open volume of Merrick lying on her knee. She looked from Calhoun to the trees in the little park; the brisk November wind was slowly stripping them of their last few leaves. The change in Lynneth had begun, she knew, that August afternoon when she admitted her own past danger. But what if she had told all the truth?

"Lynneth's very young, you know," she said gravely; adding; "Couldn't expect her never to recuperate."

"You think, then, that she'll be ready to—er—to go on again, after a while?" Calhoun asked with palpable hesitation.

Joan turned her head. Her hazel eyes questioned him.

There was no reason why he shouldn't answer that mute, yet definite and even imperious question. He had in a manner invited it, deliberately.

"Yes. I mean marry again," he said. Instinct, not purpose, made him lower his voice.

"Wouldn't be exactly an unheard-of thing to do," Joan's reply was intentionally vague. Her desire, intuitive rather than reasoned, was to force him to commit himself.

Calhoun did not want to commit himself. It was a thing he intensely disliked doing; he invariably thought more of keeping a way of retreat open than of direct attack. But he saw that only by such commitment could he make Joan his ally.

"I want her to marry me," he said with an admirable appearance of straightforwardness. "You know that, don't you?"

Again Joan looked away from him. She, the fearless, had become afraid of herself, afraid of her own motives. Could she trust them? Might not her longing make black seem white, cheat her into doing what would be—well, not best for Lynneth? She hesitated, spoke at last with a notable absence of her usual brusque decisiveness:

"I knew you did, at one time."

"Did she tell you?"

Joan's eyebrows went up. "Certainly not!" she exclaimed sharply. "She's not a bit that sort of person. What put such a beast of an idea into your head?"

He hadn't thought it a beast of an idea. He had thought it a matter of course for a woman to boast of the men she had refused. But he very clearly understood that some sort of excuse was in order.

"I didn't think of it that way," he said humbly. "She's awfully fond of you, and of course it would be different——"

He dropped the sentence. He very greatly preferred the endless possibilities of the half-said to the blunt exactness of the fully uttered.

"You told me yourself," Joan presently replied, with a little outward thrust of the lip. "We all knew. But Lynneth's marriage——"

He shook his head. "There's no other woman in the world for me," he averred bromidically.

At the moment, he honestly believed there wasn't.

As he had once presented himself to Ashby Lawrence in the rôle of the patriotic young politician, so now he was presenting himself to Joan in that of the model lover. But he wondered why she kept staring so intently out of the window?

Her eyes on the bare brown patch where her favourite hyacinths bloomed in spring, Joan was asking her-

self what the new, bitter pain was doing to her? She ought to be able to bear it better—she wasn't exactly used to happiness! But had she been disinterested, honest with herself during this talk with Calhoun? Or had she tried to encourage him, to help him so that he might take Lynneth out of the reach of—the other? And if he did, what would she gain? Lynneth gone, he, the other, might even stop coming to the apartment, since he very certainly didn't come there now to see *her*, good friends though they were, and splendid talks as they had had together! She would be left lonely and alone. . . .

If she had even been quite sure the other man really wanted Lynneth! Then her way would have been plain. But she was not sure. And Calhoun had loved her so long! She must be fair to Calhoun—the argument broke down in a wry little smile at her sophistry. She couldn't help being honest, even with herself.

"I hope," she said slowly, "I hope you'll succeed, some day. It would be much better for Lynneth if—— Here she is!"

A key had clicked in the outer door.

Beneath the octagonal mesh of her crape-bordered veil, the wind had whipped Lynneth's cheeks to a delicate pink. Though still excessively thin, her body had regained something of its old elasticity; in her eyes was something of the old, wistfully eager interest.

The woman who loved her noted these signs of returning vitality, and tried to be only glad. Why should Lynneth go solitary all her days, when this Danvers Calhoun had cared for her so long? "Danvers Calhoun!" chuckled the little mocking imp in her brain. "Why do you say 'Danvers Calhoun?' Why not—the other?"

Lynneth greeted Calhoun, touched Joan's shoulder affectionately in passing, and remarked as she sat down and began to pull off her black gloves; "It's such a wonderful day I couldn't bear to come in." She paused, thinking of the little white cloud which had seemed to



float before her, high up there in the blue. Geoffrey had always called such tiny fleecy clouds "puff-balls." . . . She pulled the gloves into shape and added; "I'm sorry I was so long. Have you been waiting tea for me?"

"Kettle must be boiling by now. I'll get it." Joan was glad to eliminate herself for a moment.

"I brought you up the papers of that mortgage, and the assignment has gone to be recorded. It'll take a couple of months to get it done," Calhoun explained in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"Oh, thank you! You've been so good and taken so much trouble! I don't know what I'd have done if I hadn't had you to advise me!" Lynneth was sincerely grateful.

"It hasn't been any trouble. I *like* doing things for you—greatest pleasure I have." He paused a breath-space, then hurried on in the manner of one wishing to get away from a too-impulsively admitted truth; "Now here's the bond, and this is the mortgage——"

He was still enumerating the various papers when Joan came in with the tea-pot.

Lynneth always poured tea. As she gave him his cup she said casually; "I met Valerie and her husband, down by Washington Square. They've bought an apartment, she told me, but it isn't ready yet, so they're staying with her people. She's looking splendidly; handsomer than ever, I thought."

"How do you like Larford?" Calhoun asked.

Lynneth gave a little shrug. "I scarcely know him. I've only met him once or twice. He seems to be making Valerie very happy."

"He's lucky to have the chance," Calhoun declared earnestly, and was going on to improve the occasion when it was spoiled—for him—by the coming of Roderrick Malvin. Malvin sat down with the air of one intending to remain, and Calhoun promptly departed.

With him went the need for making conversation.

There was a long, contented silence. Then through the noises of the street and the quiet of the room, sounded the droning hum of an aeroplane, flying towards Long Island.

Lynneth went to the window. Malvin and Joan sat watching her. Behind her back the Englishman glanced questioninglly at Joan. She smiled, and gave the slightest of nods. Such unuttered questions and answers had passed frequently between them during the months when they had feared for Lynneth with a dread they were alike unwilling to put into words.

The plane had disappeared. Lynneth spoke tentatively; "I wish I could have seen Geoffrey take the air! I never did, you know."

Malvin understood, and gave her what she wanted.

"It was wonderful! He and his machine were like one living thing. I remember watching him as he came back one night—Dunsany has described it better than I can. I ran across the passage the other day, and thought you might like to see it." He took a slender, red-bound book out of his pocket. "Here it is!"

An instant the two heads bent over one page. Joan was silent, looking on. It seemed to her then that all her life had been spent that way—in looking on.

Lynneth glanced up. "He makes you see it all! I feel as if I'd been watching Geoff——" She broke off with a sharp little intake of breath.

"Will you keep the book?" Malvin asked. "Just as a kind of 'au revoir.' I"—he paused an instant—"I'm going home Saturday."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Lynneth exclaimed frankly. "We'll miss you dreadfully, Joan and I. I thought you'd be here for months yet! When did you decide to go?"

"Yesterday. I—— It seemed best."

"But you'll come back?"

"Some day—I hope."

Lynneth had other questions to ask. But Joan did not open her lips.

Calhoun had left Stuyvesant Park with his mind so full of Lynneth and her concerns that when he reached the Armytages—he had assiduously cultivated both Lisa and her husband—one of the first things he said was; “I’ve just been in to see Mrs. Tressel.”

Lisa removed the excessively long cigarette holder of elaborately carved jade from her lips and blew a meditative cloud of smoke into the air before she asked briefly; “How’s she looking?”

“Better, I think. Much better. She had a little colour in her face for once.”

“Ah! Well, when a widow takes to rouge you can be quite sure she’s beginning to look about her.” Surveying Calhoun through slightly narrowed eyes, she sent forth another cloud of smoke. She had not forgotten that he had once been “rather devoted” to Lynneth.

“Sure it was rouge?” Armytage put in maliciously. He liked to annoy the wife who ruled him.

They were in the black, Kali-dominated drawing-room, Calhoun seated in one of the very uncomfortable carved chairs, Armytage lazily trying to tease the goblin-like fish in the aquarium, Lisa stretched indolently among the sofa-cushions, swathed in the diaphanous green chiffons she affected. Other guests were expected, but they were late.

“After all,” Calhoun remarked with careful indifference, “after all, Tressel’s been dead over a year.”

His indifference was just a little too careful, but such subtleties often escaped Lisa, and they escaped her now. She did not want Calhoun herself, but not to want a man and to look on complacently while he makes love to another woman, are two entirely separate things.

“Yes,” she replied slowly, “yes, so it is! A good bit more than a year. He died at least six months before Valerie was married.”



A quicker ear than Calhoun's would have caught the change of tone that sounded in those last three words. He missed it altogether.

"Mrs. Tressel says Mrs. Larford is looking handsomer than ever. That marriage has turned out mighty well, hasn't it?" he said.

Maladroit as it all was, this last remark, apart even from its touch of impertinence, was the worst of his blunders. But he remained comfortably unaware of his mis-step. He did not even see the venomous look in the pale narrow eyes.

"Very well." There was a file-like edge to Lisa's metallic voice. "Very well indeed—so far."

Calhoun's surprise was genuine. "So far!" he repeated. "Why, what do you mean by 'so far'?"

Lisa smiled thinly. "What do you suppose I mean?"

He welcomed the suggestion of possible scandal. "You think, then——?"

"Perhaps! But if I do, I'm going to keep it to myself a while. You might ask Phil his ideas on the subject. He and Valerie have always been such great friends, you know! Why, they'll even go as far as Riverside Drive for a nice, quiet, undisturbed chat!"

Phil turned quickly. Turned, not on Lisa, but as though retreating from her. . . .

She smiled again. Then, very idly; "Give me another cigarette, will you?" she said. "By the way, I hear Daisy Carter's gone to Reno. Has any one told you anything about it?"

But she was not thinking of Daisy Carter, any more than of the cigarette she was fitting into the green jade holder.

So Valerie was looking handsomer than ever, was she? And her marriage had turned out mighty well! Valerie was happy. Valerie—was happy!

It was a slow, secretive smile of anticipation that hovered now on Lisa's reddened lips.

## CHAPTER FOURTH

VALERIE came hurrying into the little office behind the shop. And even if the hour had not been the—for Valerie!—utterly preposterous one of ten in the morning, the look on her face would have justified Lynneth's surprised; "Why, what's the matter?"

"It's Lisa!" cried Valerie in outraged tones. "It's Lisa! And after she'd promised—You *told* me she'd promised!"

"Do for mercy's sake try to be a little more definite, Valerie!" Lynneth exclaimed. She had been interrupted in the midst of an intricate calculation, which would have to be done all over again. "What about Lisa?"

"It's that damned letter! She may—oh, I don't know what she's going to do. It's a perfect shame! Why can't she leave me alone? Here I've got everything just as I like, and not a single worry in the world, and now she's——"

"Stop whining, and tell me what's happened."

"I wasn't whining! You're so dreadfully unsympathetic, Lynneth! I come to you in my trouble, and tell you everything, and instead of appreciating it and doing all you can to help me——"

"You haven't told me anything yet," Lynneth again interrupted. "What's the fuss about? Begin at the beginning and hurry up. I'm busy."

Bullying Valerie was, she knew, the only way of bringing her speedily to the point.

"We went to Ashby Lawrence's to supper last night, after the Horse Show. Andrew's got a cold—quite a horrid cold—and he wanted to stay home. But you know how queer Mr. Lawrence is, and of course I couldn't go without him. I wish I had, though! Well,

we were alone for a minute while we were getting into our wraps—I don't see why she insists on wearing green, do you? It may be awfully artistic, but *I* think——”

“Never mind that now. Who were alone, and when?”

“Lisa and I, of course. Honestly, Lynneth, there are times——! Well, she looked me up and down in that horrid, slimy sort of way she has, and she said; ‘I’ve been thinking things over, and I can’t make up my mind whether to sue for divorce, or merely send that letter to your husband. With his views, it would be interesting to see what he’d do!’ I give you my word you could have knocked me over with a feather!”

“What did you say?”

“I said; ‘What on earth are you talking about, Lisa?’ Then she smiled—she has the hatefulest smile!—and told me not to pretend I didn’t know, and she was going to see her lawyer tomorrow—that’s today, of course—and consult with him.”

“But she promised!” Lynneth exclaimed. “Didn’t you remind her?”

“I didn’t have time. Andrew called me to hurry. We were going on to a dance, and I wasn’t able to say another word. It was awful!”

Lynneth briefly reflected. “What did Lisa mean when she spoke of your husband’s ‘views’?”

“Oh, Andrew’s a Roman Catholic, you know! He doesn’t believe in divorce. We got talking about it at supper—so silly of him! I can’t imagine why he didn’t hold his tongue. I don’t believe Lisa’d ever have thought of doing anything—There’s no reason for her wanting to get rid of Phil! She has him right under her thumb. He’s only Mrs. Armytage’s husband; that’s what they call him at the clubs. No; she just wants to spoil things for me. If she should send that letter to Andrew——!”

“Why not go to him and tell him the truth about it yourself, straight off? If he believed you——”



"Of course he wouldn't believe me! He's frightfully jealous! He mightn't divorce me, but he'd think—oh, all sorts of dreadful things!"

"Well, if he doesn't trust you——"

"Oh, my dear! No man ever trusts his wife—that way. Not if he's in love with her."

Lynneth shook her head. Geoffrey would have taken her word in the face of a dozen letters! She was sure of that. But she didn't attribute it to any difference between herself and Valerie Larford. The comparison she made was between Geoffrey and the other man.

"But if I backed you up?" she asked, absently drawing little lines and circles on the pad before her.

"He'd think you were lying. Oh, I know men, Lynneth, and you don't!"

Lynneth gave a little shrug. She had never accepted the popular theory that to know human nature and to think badly of it are necessarily one and the same thing.

"You haven't been seeing much of Phil Armytage, have you?" she asked suddenly.

Valerie wriggled, and looked uncomfortable. "We-ell, not so very much. But—oh, you know how it is! Things that are really perfectly all right can be made to look queer if—if——"

So that was it! Valerie had been amusing herself. Valerie never could resist amusing herself!

"Yes," she said quietly, and drew two or three more circles, before she added; "The question is, what are you going to do?"

"Oh, *I* can't do anything! There's no use in *my* trying to talk Lisa over—she hates me too much. It's you!"

"But what have I to do with it?"

"*You* brought me Lisa's promise; *you* made me feel safe! It's up to you to see that I am safe!"

The consummate impudence of this fairly took Lynneth's breath away. It had not occurred to her to remember that Valerie had no claim, less than no claim,

upon her help and sympathy. It had been enough that she was in need. But to accuse her of being responsible, to demand, not request, her help as a right!

"Your impertinence, Valerie, is simply stupendous!" she remarked coolly.

Valerie instantly began to sob. "Oh, Linnie darling, I never thought you'd go back on me!" she tearfully protested.

Linneth's pencil traced line after line on the paper. Her thoughts questioned; "What would you want me to do, Geoff, if you were here? Ought I to go? It'll be a horribly unpleasant job, and the chances are I shan't be able to move Lisa one hair'sbreadth. There isn't any good reason why I should be mixed up in this abominable business all over again—but Geoff dear, there is a chance! And if Lisa does start things, she'll make that poor Mr. Larford miserably unhappy, and Aunt Honoria too. Even Aunt Honoria'd have to know there was something wrong, then! I suppose I might at least try! I believe that's what you'd want me to do, dear. If you were here, you'd tell me to 'buck up and carry on.' That was what you always did, Geoff! You never shirked anything. And I won't!"

"Stop crying, Valerie," she said aloud. "I'll at least try to do something with Lisa. I'll go and see her this afternoon."

Valerie's tears ceased as abruptly as if a tap had been turned off. "Couldn't you go now?"

"No, I couldn't! Doesn't it ever occur to you that other people may occasionally have affairs of their own to attend to? Joan's away today, and I've dozens of things to look after here. I'll call you up this evening and let you know what's happened."

"Oh, all right. We'll be home. Andrew has an idea his cold's too bad for him to go out. Men do so love to coddle themselves! We were going to the theatre, but perhaps it's just as well we're not, since you're to keep

me waiting so long!" concluded Valerie with an ag-grieved little sniff.

Nor was she much better pleased that evening, when over the telephone she heard the results of Lynneth's embassy. For a slight delay was all that had been obtained. Lisa had smilingly reminded Lynneth of the wording of her promise. She had promised not to interfere with Valerie's marriage, and said nothing at all of what she might or might not do after Valerie was married! Still, since Mr. and Mrs. Larford were dining there the following Thursday, she'd agree to wait and hear what Valerie had to say. They could have a talk when the other guests were gone. And of course she might be persuaded to alter her plans. She didn't say she would; she merely said she might.

"There's only one thing for it, Valerie," Lynneth finished. "Go there, and keep your head up. Don't let her see that you're afraid of her! Tell her your husband won't believe a word against you. That's the line I took."

"You didn't accomplish much, did you?" complained Valerie. "Oh, it's easy enough for you to talk——! I'll have to go there to dinner, I suppose. But I do think if you'd really tried you could have induced her to give you the letter! You made me think she'd promised. You wrote me——"

"Read over the note I sent you, and you'll see——"

"Goodness gracious, you don't suppose I kept it, do you? I believe you want to get me into trouble! You've gone over to Lisa's side, and that's why you suggested my telling Andrew, when you know perfectly well——"

Lynneth hung up the receiver. But she wondered. Would Lisa and Valerie, all else remaining unaltered, have hated each other so vehemently had they been daughters of the same mother, as well as of the same father? Before she learned her letters, Lisa had learned to be jealous of Valerie!



And what was it she had said when reminded of those others she would make miserable by carrying out her threat against Valerie?

"Andrew Larford's nothing to me," she had replied coolly. "And your Aunt Honoria isn't *my* mother, though they taught me to call her that before I was old enough to know better. As for father—well, he brought it on himself!"

"I wish I knew if there was anything I could do!" Lynneth murmured under her breath. It wasn't easy to remain inactive! But perhaps this was one of those times when, as Geoff used to say, you only made bad worse by trying to help. "You've got to leave something to Providence—occasionally!" he had laughed.

Oh, that dear gay laugh of his. . . .

What would happen at the coming dinner? She had small expectation of any relenting on Valerie's part, remembering her expression, the tone in which she had said; "Since my very dear half-sister and her admirable husband are to dine here Thursday night, perhaps I'd best not do anything before Friday. It might interfere with my table arrangements if they didn't come!"

The important Thursday arrived, and proved to be one of those days when the weather seems intent on demonstrating how very disagreeable it can be if it chooses. It rained, sleeted, hailed and snowed, freezing and thawing alternately, while a high east wind, rushing around corners and hurling itself against buildings with shrieks of delight, did its detestable best to make every one miserable. Joan and Lynneth fought their way home from the shop over streets as slippery as glass. No taxis were to be had, and they were thoroughly chilled and all but exhausted before they reached the apartment. As night closed in the storm increased. Lynneth wondered whether Valerie would try to use the weather as an excuse for staying home? Not that it would make much difference! Only by defying Lisa

could Valerie hope to thwart her. But Valerie had not courage enough for defiance.

Suddenly she turned to the telephone. She would try again to make Valerie see what was her best, perhaps her only chance.

Valerie spoke fretfully. "Have I done anything? Well, I called Lisa up and told her Andrew had a frightful cold, and oughtn't to go out on such a night. It's the truth, too!"

"What did she say?"

"Say? She said she'd advise me to come—it wouldn't be good for me to stay away, whatever it might be for Andrew. But the tone she said it in!"

"She threatened——?"

"That was what it amounted to. You know that horrid snaky way she has? Well, any idiot could have told what she meant by it's not being good for me to stay away!"

"But if your husband's really ill? It's an awful night!"

"Oh, it's just a cough. And Lisa——"

"You must stand up to her, Valerie, you *must*. Remember what I told you! But I do honestly believe it would be ever so much better for you to tell everything to your husband. If he heard it all from you——"

"Oh, it's very easy for you to talk! If you were in my place—— Hush! There's Andrew calling me. Good-by!"

Lynneth put back the receiver with a shrug and a sigh. She had done her best. But what would the next day bring?

It brought no message from Valerie. Nor did any come the following day, or the day after that. Lynneth again dismissed the matter from her mind. If things had gone wrong, she would have heard fast enough! And she had plenty to think about. The shop was prospering, and Joan's satisfaction over the autumn sales

brought Lynneth the first faint little gleam of something almost like happiness she had known since Geoffrey's death. And instead of trying to extinguish it as a kind of treachery, she cherished and encouraged it.

For she was learning to bear her burden. It was no less heavy; only better adjusted. She could not stoop through life. She must manage somehow to stand erect, however crushing the weight laid upon her.

The first amazed cry, "Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" which breaks from the lips of the bereaved, had ceased to echo in her thoughts. Other women had endured what she was enduring—and worse. For she had her memories, perfect and unspoiled.

Were they not enough? Using them as a foundation, she was doing her utmost to rebuild her life, taking her place, not automatically but consciously, among those who may be called upon for service. No dramatic opportunities, no invitations to splendid sacrifice, broke the monotony of her quiet routine. It was a day by day effort to do well in little things—such very little things, they sometimes seemed!

Yet she had continually to fight for the courage to go on, fight to make herself appear interested in what happened around her. If she could not be happy, she would at least seem cheerful! Wouldn't Geoffrey regard anything else as mere cowardly shirking of the duty lying upon every one—the duty of refraining from adding to the world's woe by any exhibition of personal sorrows, the duty of apparent cheerfulness?

If only she had had a child! Geoffrey's child, that would look at her with his eyes, and smile at her as he used to do. Flesh and blood of his, that she could hold close to her heart when the ache of craving was almost beyond endurance!

She had Joan, and her memories. If her time of joy were short, there had been nothing to mar it while it lasted. And nothing and no one could mar it now.



But Joan was unhappy. Joan too was hiding pain. And if Joan were taken from her——! That possibility she hardly dared face. She could only go on from day to day. Who could tell what might or might not happen?

And yet, when something did happen, it was a something she had never thought of. Early one morning, while she was pinning on her veil and Joan, whose way it was to clap her hat on her head and jerk it into place, lingered over her second cup of coffee, the telephone rang.

"Oh, hang that fool operator!" exclaimed Joan disgustedly. "She called us three times yesterday, when she wanted Audubon!"

"I'll go." Lynneth tucked in an invisible hairpin, and picked up the receiver. "Hello!"

It was Mrs. Hetherington's voice which sounded in her ear. At first she failed to recognize it. For those usually placid tones were placid no longer, but shook so that it was difficult to make out the words:

"I want to speak to Mrs. Tressel—— Oh! Lynneth, is it you? Do come down as soon as you can! We're in dreadful trouble!"

Lynneth caught her lower lip between her teeth. So Lisa—— But what was this that Mrs. Hetherington was saying?

"Oh, Lynneth, Andrew's dead, and Valerie—I'm afraid Valerie's lost her mind! She says the most awful things——! Oh, do please come as quickly as you can!"

## CHAPTER FIFTH

HURRYING into her coat, Lynneth briefly explained what had happened. Joan expressed a fervent wish that the entire Hetherington family would emigrate to Patagonia forthwith, but admitted that since they were still in Washington Square, to Washington Square Lynneth must go.

She found the entire establishment in a state of decorously suppressed commotion. Even Wilbur's professional impassivity was cracking here and there, letting glimmers of excitement and of furtive knowledge slide through. That terrible knowledge of the household servant! There wasn't a maid or a butler on the North Side of Washington Square, nor an acquaintance of one of them, who didn't know all the history of the feud between the two daughters of Mr. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington, sixth of the name. And they would soon know every word and phrase of those hysterical outbursts which had made poor Mrs. Hetherington declare she believed Valerie had lost her mind.

Lynneth slowly ascended the once familiar stairs. When last she trod them, Geoffrey was alive. . . . The house remained, unaltered and undisturbed, but Geoffrey was gone, and now Valerie's husband too was gone, and the routine of life went on just the same, unaffected by their passing. . . .

"Dear Aunt Honoria, I'm so sorry!"

Mrs. Blazius Bleecker Hetherington held up a wet cheek to Lynneth's kiss. Lying upon her sofa, she seemed to have grown suddenly old. Her serenity had changed to a distressful bewilderment. She was hurt, perplexed, indignantly surprised at her hurt and her

perplexity. It didn't seem reasonable that such things should happen to her!

"My dear, it's too terrible!" she exclaimed, clutching Lynneth's black-gloved hands as she had probably never clutched any one's hands before. "I don't know what to do—I really don't!"

"Can I help?"

"I don't know." There was pathos in the repetition of that phrase, falling from those lips. "I don't know! I thought perhaps you could tell me—that's why I sent for you. He was ill only three days—pneumonia. It was a dreadful shock, of course, and Valerie——! Oh, my dear, I don't know what to do with Valerie!"

"Has she broken down so completely?" Lynneth, seated now on the edge of the sofa, realized the relief it was to Mrs. Hetherington to talk about her trouble.

"You can't imagine how terribly she feels! I've never seen anything like it!" All Mrs. Hetherington's thoughts were of the child who was a part of herself. She had none for Lynneth's own widowhood. "It's dreadful—dreadful! I can't bear to hear her."

"She must have been very fond of him."

"Oh, my dear, they were the most devoted couple——! And now you know the poor child blames Lisa. Of course it wasn't Lisa's fault poor Andrew had such a dreadful cough, or that the weather was so bad the night of her dinner—though I do think when Valerie telephoned her, she ought not to have insisted on their coming!"

And Lynneth understood. Understood more than the mother even suspected.

"That must make it still worse for Valerie, to feel it might so easily have been avoided." Lynneth spoke gently, but her thoughts were very far away.

"I can't tell you——. She cries and cries—you'd scarcely recognize her! Her eyes are so red and swollen, and she's as white as a sheet."



"Poor Valerie!"

"It does seem so dreadful that such an awful thing should happen to her! We've always done everything to make her happy. Her father and I want to take her away as soon as we can, and try to distract her mind. If only she hadn't been quite so much in love with poor Andrew!"

Mrs. Hetherington sighed deeply. But Lynneth had caught the note of grievance, and understood what a relief it would be to Valerie's mother when the conventional period of mourning was over, and "poor Andrew" might with decency be forgotten.

"What was it you wanted me to do?" she asked after a moment.

"Well, I did want you to see if you could do anything with Valerie, but since I telephoned you she's fallen asleep, and of course that's the very best thing for her. Would you mind taking the car and going up to Madame Berthe's? She's sent me down half a dozen mourning hats, and I don't like any of them. See if you can't find three or four to suit me—you know my tastes. I suppose I ought to wear crape for a month or two. Then you might select a black fox set for Valerie, and if you'll just remind Madame to cut the necks of all her gowns square? A square sets off her throat so much better than a V!"

Lynneth assented. And a couple of hours had passed when, the furs and hats secured, she returned to the house on Washington Square.

"You're such a comfort, my dear!" sighed Mrs. Hetherington. She had been indulging in an unobtrusive nap, and felt much better. "You're so strong, and have such wonderful self-control! You're like your uncle in that. Now my nerves are all upset, and even Lisa——"

"Is Lisa here?" Lynneth demanded quickly.

"Yes. She and Phil came just a little while before you got back. I told them to go straight to Valerie.

She and Lisa have always been so fond of each other, and I know she looks on Phil as a real brother. I thought seeing Lisa might dispel some of her illusions. Besides, Parkins was in the room, and you know how servants——”

Across the hall and through the closed door came sharp and sudden the sound of Valerie's voice, high-pitched, hysterical. . . .

“Perhaps you'd better join them,” Mrs. Hetherington suggested nervously. “Valerie's quite beside herself. Something—something might happen!” Then as Valerie's voice rose again, clamorous in the hush of the great house; “Oh, please go, Lynneth!” she implored.

Lynneth went.

Once, and once again she knocked. But there was no answer to her knocking. Lisa was speaking now, so low she could not catch the words; that was Valerie's voice, shrill in a half-strangled, wordless cry of anger! Something of Mrs. Hetherington's tacitly admitted fear rose within her. She put her hand to the knob, opened the door, and closed it behind her.

So the four who had stood together in this same room on the day that made Lisa a bride, stood there together now, on this day that had made Valerie a widow. In great surges of recollection, it all swept back to Lynneth. Ghostly echoes of laughter, of dancing feet, of the slashing tune the band had played:

“My jazz girl, my razzle-dazzle jazz girl——”

The absurd words rang in her brain now, as they had rung in her brain then, when gay voices resounded through the house now enfolded in a thick, decorous silence.

There in the middle of the room Valerie stood—a Valerie Lynneth had never seen before. Her eyes were red and swollen, her cheeks mottled with spots of feverish

colour. For the moment, her beauty was utterly lost. Even her magnificent hair, half-loosened from its coils and slipping in a disordered, tangled mass about her neck, looked somehow—devastated. On her bare throat a red mark flamed, where she had clutched it cruelly. The delicate laces of her negligé hung in soiled shreds. Her nervous fingers twisted the fragments. . . . No wonder Mrs. Hetherington had thought her out of her mind! In this complete physical abandonment there was something brutal, something—shameless.

Had Lisa expected it? Was that why she had brought Phil here?

Valerie stood between Lisa and the door. Lisa made no attempt to change her position. But was it entirely to the liquid powder enamelling her face that her paleness was due? Who could say! Henna-dyed hair, plucked eyebrows, blue-black shadows painted upon the under eyelids, glaring scarlet of the mouth, were all of a cultivated artificiality which in its meticulous precision of detail made Lynneth think, quite irrelevantly, of Japanese lacquer. Standing with her back to the light, the over-shadowing brim of her hat obscured the greedy eyes which had more than once betrayed her. And the febrile fingers that had so ruthlessly crushed her bridal roses were hidden now within a sable muff.

Lynneth went forward quickly, and paused midway between the two women, but a little apart and to one side. As on that other day, Phil had retreated into a corner, horrified and ignored. Even Lisa had no attention to give him. In this room which had witnessed generations of cultivated repressions and inhibitions, elemental forces were at work. These two daughters of one father, whose hatred had grown with their growth, confronted each other now in the culminating hour of their long antagonism.

As Lynneth came forward, Lisa turned towards her. But still Lynneth could not see her eyes.



Suddenly Valerie spoke, jerkily, incoherently, in a high shrill voice amazingly different from her normal tones; "Lisa, you killed him! You—*killed* him! He'd be alive today—I *had* to come to you that night! I didn't dare—— He was ill then. If he'd stayed home——! You killed him! You—*killed* him!"

Lisa shrugged her shoulders. "You're hysterical, Valerie," she said coolly. "I didn't make you come to me! It was what you'd done yourself. Put the blame where it belongs; on your own shoulders, and Phil's."

She did not so much as glance at her husband.

Lynneth shivered. But the words had no effect on Valerie. Perhaps she did not even hear them.

"You killed him!" she cried again in that shrill unnatural voice, which was like no human sound Lynneth had ever heard. "He'd be alive, if you——. You killed him! And now you've come to see how I endure—I wish you were dead! Oh, I *wish* you were dead! You're bad—bad—rotten—damn you! God damn you! You killed him!" Insanely she kept babbling the awful accusation. "You killed him, you—you devil! You—murdered him!"

Lisa shrank a little then, shrank for the first time. Furtively her tongue crept out to moisten her painted lips. Otherwise she did not move. It may be she feared any attempt to leave the room might bring those writhing hands leaping to her throat. . . .

"I—I think I'd better be going," Phil Armytage mumbled, almost inaudibly. "I—I have an engagement——"

"Stay where you are," Lisa commanded.

Another torrent of words broke, babbling and incoherent, from Valerie's twisting lips. And under cover of her outcry, Phil slipped away. No one of the three noticed his going. After all, he was merely a counter in the long contest. It was with each other the half-sisters had to reckon, at each other that they stared during the sudden silence, a silence into which terror seemed to flow

as water flows into a lake when the sluice gates are opened. . . .

Then once more Lynneth intervened.

"Valerie," she said quietly. Her steady tone claimed, dominated. "Valerie!"

With a kind of snarl, Valerie turned on her. And Lynneth saw frenzy in her eyes.

Her flesh was cold—clammily cold. But she did not flinch, nor hesitate. Geoffrey would not have flinched, nor hesitated! Horror was here. Greater horror must not come. And come it would, unless she held it off. There was no one else.

Again she spoke, very quietly; "Valerie."

"You—you told me to go!" screamed Valerie in the shrill voice which was like the voice of one possessed. "You told me to go! Why, you—you planned it all! You were jealous of me because I was so happy—so happy!" A strangling sob broke in her throat. "So happy! Ah-h!"

She flung out her arms with a gurgling cry that rose almost to a shriek. And as the long floating draperies hanging loose from her shoulders fell away with the sudden movement, Lynneth saw what she prayed Valerie might have forgotten; the little Italian dagger, the wedding present Ashby Lawrence had promised Valerie long ago. Andrew Larford had probably used it as a paper knife. And there it lay on the little table, within easy reach of Valerie's clenched right hand. . . .

Grief and hatred and despair had made her irresponsible as any maniac. Lynneth knew that, knew what the tiny sharp knife could do. Another moment, and it might be too late, too late for any hope of control. Then——

She would not think of what might happen then.

"I was happy once, Valerie," she said.

Her brain worked swiftly, surely. If she could make Valerie feel that they were comrades, fellow-sufferers, she might avert what threatened. And she must, she

*must* avert it! It could not be allowed to happen. And there was no one else. Oh, if Geoffrey——

“You!” Valerie laughed. And the blood chilled and stiffened around Lynneth’s heart. “You! You don’t matter. It’s Lisa. I’ve got to make her suffer. Don’t you understand? I’ve got to make her suffer—somehow. God—God wants me to hurt her. He hates her too—— He must hate her! She’s never been hurt—never. Never. She’s bad—all bad. She killed him, I tell you! She—killed him!”

Again Lisa shrugged her shoulders, ostentatious in her bravado. “You’re all worn out, Valerie. You don’t know what you’re saying. I’ll see you again when you’re quieter. Besides, I only came to give you this. It’s of no further use to me!”

She held out the letter. An instant, and she let it drop, disdainfully.

Valerie’s eyes slowly dilated as she stared, stared, stared at the letter lying on the floor. Its possession would once have meant so much! And now meant—nothing.

With a quick movement of the head, Lynneth motioned Lisa to the door.

A dreadful choking cry seemed to tear itself out of Valerie’s throat. The blood rushed to her head. Dizzily she fell back a step, her hand fumbling in search of support.

The groping fingers touched the knife. Touched, and grasped it. An awful joy lit up the ravaged face. . . .

A phrase, absurdly commonplace, leaped to Lynneth’s lips. “Your mother wants you, Lisa!” she exclaimed. “Go to her—oh, for God’s sake, go!”

Then Valerie sprang. And even as Lynneth cried out her warning, her command, to Lisa, she caught the uplifted arm. . . .

A chair fell over with a crash.

Valerie was by far the taller and heavier, the more



muscular. She tore at the small hands that had fastened tenaciously upon her wrist. In an instant she would break their hold. And then——

“Go, Lisa!” Lynneth panted. Her heart was pounding. She tried to twist Valerie’s wrist, to make her drop the knife. But she did not try to call for help. Her heart cried; “Geoffrey!” Her lips only muttered: “Go, Lisa!”

And Lisa obeyed, knowing herself a coward, shamed, contemptible. And as the door closed upon her she heard Valerie snarl once, gutturally, unhumanly. Heard a cry of pain from Lynneth. . . .

But she did not turn back, nor try to find out what had happened. She was afraid. She could not think of what might have happened, here in this decorous, well-ordered house. She shuddered away from it, bewildered, incredulous. It couldn’t be! Such things belonged in the slums, not here on the North Side of Washington Square, not in the lives of people like Valerie and herself!

But there in the room from which she had fled, Valerie lay face downwards on the sofa, weeping wildly. Yet the shock had all but cured her hysteria. She realized what she had meant to do, had so narrowly escaped doing. . . .

For Lynneth, her nerves shivering so that she could scarcely hold her handkerchief, was wiping the blood from a tiny cut on her shoulder. It was only a scratch. But if that sharp little knife had not slipped——!

## CHAPTER SIXTH

ONE of those blank periods during which nothing in particular seems to happen, came now to Lynneth. Her shoulder had healed rapidly. Joan knew of her hurt, but Lynneth had told her it was due to an accident she didn't want to talk about. And Joan, thrusting out her lip in her customary little grimace, asked no questions.

Month succeeded month, and Lynneth, busy outwardly with her workaday routine, was inwardly absorbed by her longing for Geoffrey, her habit of referring all things to his judgment, sometimes instantly sure, sometimes obliged to think and puzzle and finally surmise as to what the verdict would be. This inward life of hers was rooted in memories; and because these memories drew to themselves, as by right of kinship, all that was high and fine and beautiful, it grew steadily in strength and loveliness. And it was, too, exercised and developed by her unceasing efforts to win through and past the occasional flashes of awareness of Geoffrey as somewhere, somehow, *being*, to that full consciousness of his presence which might be hers could she attain to it.

He had gone far beyond her. But if he was at all, his love remained, striving perhaps, as hers did, to build a bridge across the gulf. And sometimes in that quiet hour of the night when she sat with his picture before her—"talking to Geoff" she called it in her thoughts—there came moments of peace, a lightening of pain, which helped to make ultimately endurable those other hours when the realization that in this world at least she would never see him again, never speak to him again, twisted her heart. . . .

Immediately after Andrew Larford's funeral Mr.

and Mrs. Hetherington had gone South, taking Valerie with them. Of Lisa, Lynneth saw nothing, and heard only indirectly, when Danvers Calhoun, on one of his frequent Sunday afternoon visits, told of some exceptionally bizarre entertainment given by Mrs. Armytage. Ashby Lawrence was another who incidentally brought news of Lisa.

He was watching Lynneth with keenest interest. His liking for the slip of a girl with enquiring grey eyes had become a strong friendship for the woman into whom she had developed. When he heard of her marriage to Geoffrey Tressel, it had been with a hope at which he himself was half inclined to laugh. Hidden deep in his sceptical soul he held a tenuous belief in the reality of that ideal love of which poets sing. He had looked—and ridiculed his looking—to the young pair to justify it. But for such justification time was needed; and had not been granted.

Lawrence's own cynicism mocked his hope, insisting with sophisticated superiority that the idyl which had begun on the mountain would have ended in the valley, subsiding into the mutual toleration which is the final resting place of so many marriages. It would finish, instead, in forgetfulness, now that death had intervened. Was Danvers Calhoun, he wondered, to write the closing chapter? Or would it, by a refinement of irony, bear the name of Geoffrey's friend, Roderick Malvin? Either would equally imply revocation, jeering at his shame-faced wish to believe. Absurd of him, even to think of anything else! We forget, and are ourselves forgotten.

Thanksgiving was gone; Christmas too, and the New Year. Winter was passing. February's snow and ice and bitter cold gave way to the ill-tempered capriciousness of March, alternately freezing and thawing. April winds sent dust-clouds swirling through the streets, ash-coloured or golden, according to the momentary humour of the whimsical sunshine.



The business of the shop went on as usual. Calhoun's status was unchanged. Roderick Malvin wrote occasionally to Lynneth, more frequently to Joan. And it was perhaps because so little else seemed altered that the change in Joan impressed Lynneth. Never had she known the older woman so moody. If a kind of half-fearful expectancy grew more and more evident with every passing week, it often yielded suddenly to a sardonic air of anticipating the worst as a matter of course. But Joan said nothing, and Lynneth bottled up her effervescing curiosity.

It was May when this outwardly uneventful period abruptly closed with Mrs. Hetherington's unlooked-for appearance at the bookshop.

She swept in, seeming to preëempt the entire place, and embraced Lynneth warmly.

"My dear child! How glad I am to see you again! You must come to lunch with me. Now, don't think of refusing! I've something to tell you."

Serene as ever, she beamed with a full and placid satisfaction. Lynneth smiled back at her.

"It's good news, evidently."

"Oh, delightful! Do come, my dear."

"I really oughtn't to go. The spring season's still on, and we're up to our eyes in work." Lynneth spoke doubtfully. But she was slipping into her loose black coat.

"I see you haven't begun to lighten your mourning yet. Don't you think you should? Even the most conventional people don't wear it as long as they used to! Now I should think a soft lavender, just shading a little towards pink—not much, of course, but just a little—would be charmingly becoming to you," suggested Mrs. Hetherington, with a touch of something almost like eagerness that faintly surprised Lynneth. Pausing at the door of the waiting limousine; "The St. Regis, Thomas," she directed the waiting footman.

The great car rolled smoothly around the corner and into Fifth Avenue. Some trick of memory swung Lyn-neth back through the years to the impressionable girl who had thrilled over her first restaurant luncheon. . . .

"I don't think grey would suit you at all, but a really good lavender would be just right, my dear."

"I wouldn't feel comfortable in anything but black." Why was Aunt Honoria so oddly insistent?

"Oh, but my dear, you're so young! It's not right for you to waste your youth—the best part of your life. And you know people aren't half as strict about such things now as they used to be. A great many don't believe in mourning at all!"

"Isn't that something we must all decide for ourselves?"

Lynneth's tone, gentle though it was, put the subject definitely out of court. Mrs. Hetherington glanced at her, opened her lips, took another glance, and closed them. The car stopped in front of the hotel.

"I hope you're feeling as well as you look?" Lynneth remarked when they were seated at the very desirable little table by the window.

"Oh, my dear—— Just a minute. You'll have clam bouillon, won't you? And chicken livers *en brochette*? Do you like them? Or would you prefer sweetbreads with mushrooms?"

For a few moments Mrs. Hetherington's attention was absorbed; then, as the waiter left them, she turned again to Lynneth.

"I wonder if you can't guess why I'm so pleased?" she suggested, beaming at her placidly across the little table. "I'll give you a hint. Blazius likes it too, almost as much as I do!"

Her rather ponderous and quite unusual playfulness inferred only one thing to Lynneth. It was six months or more since she had seen Lisa, there in the house on Washington Square . . . her nerves tautened at the

memory. But none of the evoked recollections betrayed itself in face or tone as she asked, with due regard for Mrs. Hetherington's Victorian prejudices; "Is it about Lisa? Is she going to transform you into a grandmother?"

"Lisa? Oh no, my dear! It has nothing to do with Lisa, nothing at all. It's about Valerie."

Lynneth shook her head. "Then I'm afraid I can't guess."

Mrs. Hetherington paused to sip her Appolinaris. "When I've told you all about it, I'm sure you'll think as we do, that it's the very best thing that could have happened! I hoped it would, eventually. Valerie's too young and too lovely to remain a widow."

"You don't mean that Valerie——?"

"Yes. Valerie's engaged!"

"Valerie!"

"She's going to marry Maurice Esterwood. His mother was a Miss van Sturtevant, a distant connection of my own. He came to Miami on his yacht, the *Sea-Lady*. Valerie wasn't going anywhere, of course, but you know she's always been devoted to yachting. That was how it happened. They're thoroughly congenial, and it's all most satisfactory in every way."

"I'm very much surprised." It was all 'most satisfactory!' And not a year had passed since she had heard Valerie's passionate cry; "You killed him! You—killed him!"

"Yes, of course." A breath of haste ruffled, like the tiniest of ripples, the bland surface of Mrs. Hetherington's placidity. "Yes, of course. I knew you would be. It's true it isn't very long——. But we're not announcing it yet. We're only telling a few intimate friends. You can speak to Joan if you want to, but please ask her not to say anything. They won't be married for several months; not until the year is out. Maurice is



quite prepared to wait. I want you to meet him, my dear. I'm sure you'll like him very much."

"I haven't seen Valerie since just after Mr. Larford's death. She seemed terribly distressed."

"Oh, my dear, what a dreadful day that was! You were such a comfort to me! I'll never forget how sweet you were. Won't you take a few more peas?"

"Thanks, I have some. They're delicious."

"Yes, aren't they?—Well, but about Valerie. She was quite heartbroken. I don't believe any woman ever suffered more! When we first went away she was terribly depressed; we had to coax and coax her before she'd go anywhere or do anything. But that makes it seem all the better, doesn't it, that she should have found some one to comfort her and take poor Andrew's place! Oh, my dear, what would we do if Time didn't heal our wounds and teach us to forget?" Mrs. Hetherington sighed gently. "And as I said, they won't be married until the full year is over. Valerie's determined to show every respect to poor Andrew's memory. We're going to Paris this summer for her trousseau."

"Is she very happy?" Lynneth asked.

"Oh yes, indeed! Very happy. Just between ourselves, my dear, I think Maurice is much better suited to her than poor Andrew ever was. I'm sure he'd be glad, though, if he knew. He loved her very dearly, and so, of course, he'd want her to be happy."

"If he knew!" echoed Lynneth's thoughts. "If he knew!" But aloud she only gave an inarticulate little murmur, which Mrs. Hetherington was at liberty to interpret as she pleased. Both were silent while the waiter brought the *meringue glacée*.

"But what about you, Lynneth?" Mrs. Hetherington presently enquired. "I hear Danvers Calhoun is still as devoted as ever, but that there's another man on the horizon."

Lynneth stiffened. "People talk—nonsense. Mr. Calhoun is my very good friend. That's all."

Mrs. Hetherington smiled incredulously. "And the other man? Sir—what's his name?—Rupert Morven?"

"If you mean Sir Roderick Malvin, that's just as absurd as the other." She paused an instant. "I'm Geoffrey Tressel's wife, Aunt Honoria."

Mrs. Hetherington smiled again, confident in her superior wisdom. This dainty little dark-haired niece of hers, with the small determined face and steady grey eyes—why, she wasn't much more than a child, after all!

"Oh, my dear," she said comfortably, "you may talk that way now, but wait a few years! You're young; you'll forget your loss, and be happy again. Why, you've most of your life still before you! It wouldn't be right for you to—to nurse your grief *too* long. One owes the dead respect, of course. But that's no reason why you should practice suttee."

The word pleased Mrs. Hetherington. She quite preened herself over her cleverness.

Lynneth was silent. Whatever she said, must sound like an arraignment of Valerie. And she didn't want to arraign Valerie, or any one else.

But Mrs. Hetherington had been tacitly defending Valerie with every word she uttered, and as Lynneth re-entered the bookshop a little later, she wondered whether it wasn't merely an attempt to bolster up that tacit defence which had made Aunt Honoria suggest—well, absurdities? The idea that she might some day re-marry had never entered her mind. It simply hadn't occurred to her. But now she began uncomfortably to wonder whether it had occurred to other people? To Joan? To Danvers Calhoun? To Geoffrey's friend, Roderick Malvin? She had liked him, welcomed him. Surely he couldn't have mistaken her liking and her welcome? Such an end to their friendship——

She opened the door. Malvin himself confronted her, coming across the little shop.

She stared at him, speechless for a moment. She had supposed him very far away. And she wished he was!

"Did I startle you?"

Her quick ear caught the change in his tone. He was excited—quite tremendously excited—about something.

"I didn't think you were anywhere in this part of the world!" she exclaimed as they shook hands. How cold his fingers were!

He laughed. Again that note of excitement!

"I decided to come over rather suddenly. I—there was something I wanted to do. I shan't stay long."

"But we'll see you——?"

"Well, rather!" He seemed to find something acutely humorous in the suggestion.

He was looking at her, but as she suddenly perceived with profound relief, he scarcely saw her. She was there, and he was perfunctorily aware of her presence, but something else absorbed him.

He left almost immediately, and other affairs demanded Lynneth's attention. She had no opportunity of speaking privately to Joan until that evening, when they were together as usual in the latter's sitting room. Lynneth had her own, but it was smaller, and comparatively little used.

Joan, coming in, had switched off all but a single light. "You'll read your eyes out of your head one of these days, Lynn! Let's talk."

Lynneth willingly closed her book. "What do you suppose brought Aunt Honoria to the shop today?"

Lounging in her favourite big chair, her face in the shadow, Joan hunched one thin shoulder.

"Give it up. Never was any good at guessing riddles! What was it?" she asked lazily.

"Valerie's going to be married!"

"Hasn't wasted much time, has she?" Joan's lip went



out in her habitual little grimace. "Well, she's got a right to do as she pleases! She's a widow, if she hasn't been one long."

"Why should that make any difference? It isn't as if she'd been divorced!"

"Don't quite get you. D'you mean, you'd think it all right for her to re-marry if she was a divorcée, but rather balk at her doing it since she's only a widow? That the idea?"

Lynneth nodded. "I can't see the smallest objection to a second marriage after a divorce. Isn't the divorce itself an acknowledgment that the marriage wasn't—wasn't the real thing? But when two people have been happy together, then a second marriage—I don't see how it's possible! Oh, I know they talk about doing it for companionship, and it's being different from the first, and all that, but twist it as you choose, it's a good deal like adultery!"

"Not exactly the conventional point of view! Even the churches that won't re-marry divorced people never turn a hair if a widow——"

"But don't you see how that implies a denial of the immortality they profess to believe in, or else the putting of marriage on a purely material and physical basis?"

"Um-m! Well, perhaps. But life's a thing of flux and change. People don't stay put emotionally any more than they do physically. When old ties are broken, they form new ones—same as Valerie's doing."

"I don't know how she *can*!" Lynneth exclaimed. "She seemed broken-hearted when her husband died. Valerie was—why, almost raving! And now Aunt Honoria talks about how nice it is that she's found some one to take 'poor Andrew's place!' Her husband's place!"

Would Geoffrey have thought that horrid, or just weak, and rather pitiful? What a half-comic, half-ironic conclusion to the drama which had once verged so very near to tragedy!

"‘These violent griefs have violent ends,’" paraphrased Joan coolly. Then in another, lower tone she said slowly with a curious, curbed intensity; "Don't let's talk about that any more now, Lynn. I—there's something I want to say to you."

"Good news, or bad?"

"Depends on the point of view. Sort of mixed, I suppose."

"So long as you're not ill again——"

"Goodness, no! Never was better in my life."

"Then nothing else matters—much."

"Oh, Lynn——!" Joan paused, bit her lip, and made a fresh start. "You—when you got back today, you had a few minutes' talk with Roderick Malvin?"

"Only a minute. I meant to ask you about him. He seemed terrifically excited over something. Did he say anything to you?"

"He didn't tell you why he came back?"

"No, not a word. He only——" Suddenly she sat up straight. "Joan, what's happened?" she demanded breathlessly.

In the darkness she heard Joan give a little gasp, as if abruptly plunged into ice-cold water. Then swift and sharp came the reply, almost flung at her. And who but Joan would have made such a statement in such a way?

"We're going to be married!"

For the second time that day, surprise made Lynne speechless. Geoff's friend—and Joan! "You—and Rod Malvin?" she exclaimed—and the next instant was out of her chair and hugging Joan hard. "Oh, my dear, my dear, how splendid! How perfectly splendid! He's a real man, every blessed inch of him! You'll be gloriously happy together—I'm sure you will! Oh, Joan, my darling old Joan, I am so glad!"

The two women held each other fast. . . .

But at last Joan said, very low; "It means leaving you, Lynn. He has to rejoin his regiment in India next

month. He wants me to go with him. It's only ten days."

All the strength seemed to ooze out of Lynneth's knees. She felt suddenly weak and nerveless. With all her generous heart she had rejoiced in Joan's late-coming happiness, with never a thought of what that happiness would mean to her. Now her quick visualizing imagination spread it all before her, the emptiness, the loneliness. . . .

Geoff wouldn't have been so selfish! He'd only have been glad!——

Swiftly she rallied her courage, resolutely she turned her back on the dreariness. Time enough to face all that, when Joan was gone! Not even the shadow of a shadow should dim Joan's present joy, could she prevent it.

"Of course you couldn't expect a mere man to think of such a trifle as a trousseau!" she exclaimed gayly. "All the same, we'll get you properly fitted out, if we have to sit up nights doing it! You won't be able to have anything except ready-mades, but I intend you to be a credit to your country! Why, it's the most wonderful romance! And India——! Oh, Joan, do you suppose they'll let you ride an elephant? I've always wanted to ride an elephant!"

Something of strain, something even of feverishness, was in her gayety; yet these did not lessen its sincerity. Joan felt, and saw, and understood. And when she smiled, her lips quivered a little, though she was so happy.

"Don't know about the elephant," she replied shakily. "We haven't had time to talk much about——about that part of it. Not yet."

"It was only today, then? You hadn't known before?"

Joan shook her head. "No. I—I've cared a long while, Lynn. But it didn't seem possible that *he*——" She could not go on. But the old harshness, the old



brusqueness were gone from the voice that had lingered over the pronoun.

"He came back for that, then? To ask you——?"

"Yes. We've been writing to each other, you know, and—I'm very proud, Lynn! But—oh, Lynn"—her hands closed tightly on her friend's—"I thought it was—*must* be—you he cared about and came to see! I tried hard not to be jealous, but there were times when I—when I almost hated you, Lynn! I knew you only liked him, and it seemed as if I couldn't bear——"

Lynneth put both arms around Joan then, and kissed her. "I've had my share," she said softly. "All of it! And now you're going to have yours. Oh, I'm glad, so glad for you, Joan!"

## CHAPTER SEVENTH

EVEN for so simple a wedding as Joan's would be, a good deal of preparation was required, apart from the purchasing of the many necessities for the long journey. And there was, too, more than a little business that must be settled. Joan insisted upon retaining her interest in the bookshop. Its management would be entirely in Lynneth's hands now, Madge Ayres having suddenly decided to accept the invitation of a rich and childless friend who had lately lost her husband, and go to live with her in California. Of them all, Lynneth only would be left. Left alone.

Busy as she was during that hurried time, there were nerve-twisting moments when she sharply realized the solitude that would be her portion through all the days and nights to come. Empty, silent rooms. No intimate talk; no one to consult with; no one to care if she were ill or over-tired. The little things of everyday companionship, a glance, a welcoming smile, the click of a home-coming key turning in the lock, all the trifles which mean so much more to us than we ever know until we have lost them, would be taken from her.

This home which she and Joan had made together would be a home no longer. Would be hers no longer, since she had refused the gift of the lease Joan had tried to force upon her. Yet it was here that the first consciousness of Geoffrey as *being* had come to her, here that she had struggled to rebuild her life, to make it not unworthy of the love he had given her. . . .

In the autumn she must leave it all, and move to smaller, cheaper quarters.

Through these long months, Joan's friendship had been

like a wall at her back. That defence removed, she must rely absolutely upon herself, and her own strength—if strength she could find!

The last evening came. And came, it seemed to her, before she had time even to take breath. It wasn't possible that on the very next morning Joan was to be married and sail for England with her husband!

It was the last time the two friends would be together, here where they had so often discussed matters large and small, or sat in peaceful, quiet companionship. They had so much to say to each other, so short a while in which to say it! Yet both were silent. For the moment when last words must be spoken is invariably the one in which it is most difficult to find words to speak.

Joan crouched on the window-seat, long hands clasping her drawn-up knees. Spring had been late that year, and there was still a feathery lightness to the green misting the trees. Overhead a crescent moon hung low, clear cut against the violet-blue of the star-strewn sky.

Without shifting her position, Joan spoke suddenly; "Lynn, I'm bothered about you. I do hate leaving you all by yourself!"

"I'm not exactly rejoicing over the prospect!" Lynne's smile was somewhat wry. "I'm going to miss you dreadfully, Joan!"

"Life's just one absurdity after another! Of course, I'll admit I never liked being alone and having to scratch up a living; still, I could do with it. But as for you—you're such an atrociously domestic sort of female!" Pulling one knee higher, she added abruptly; "What are you going to do with yourself in the future, Lynn?"

"I don't quite know. I've had the best."

"Yes. And the best can't be had more than once. No use denying that! But you're so young! There may easily be forty or fifty years ahead of you. And you can't live on memories forever. Not even if the memories stayed fresh and vivid. They won't. Time will



fade them and cover them over after a while, and then—what will you do then?"

Lynneth had no answer ready. She could not put into words her unceasing struggle to reach Geoffrey, nor her occasional awareness of him as somewhere, somehow *being*. Words were too concrete, too tangible. By making fixed and definitive they would falsify what was essentially fluctuating and elusive.

Joan hesitated a moment. In order to argue as she felt she ought to argue, she must suppress her sympathies and emotions, making cold logic, the matter-of-fact, dominate absolutely. It wasn't easy. But she was deeply anxious about Lynneth; and that anxiety drove her on, drove her further, perhaps, than she had meant to go.

"Don't you think," she asked with much of her old abruptness, "don't you think that perhaps some day—not now, but some day—you might decide to take the second best, the half loaf, and make it do? There's a lot of nourishment in half loaves, sometimes!"

"What exactly do you mean, Joan?"

"I mean that you were born to be the head of a household, not the head of a business. I mean that you've got to patch your life up somehow. I mean—Danvers Calhoun."

"Joan! You don't——"

"Wait a minute! Let me finish. I've been thinking over what you said the other day about second marriages. Lynn, I believe you've left out a good deal. If you had children, it would be different. Then I wouldn't say a word. But—you've always wanted them. They'd make up to you for any quantity—— Give you something to live for."

Lynneth bit her lip. Only that afternoon she had seen a little girl skipping along beside her mother, an adorable little chubby-cheeked and bright-eyed morsel of humanity, who smiled at her shyly, and then with sudden courage

waved an absurdly small mitten——. The baby hand seemed to be squeezing the blood from her heart.

A child of her own! Her child—and Geoffrey's!

“——Or if you had some one very near to you, some one for whom you cared tremendously,” Joan was saying. “But you haven't. And you can't centre your life about what's past, dear. The very nature of things won't let you.”

“It isn't past. It never will be. It is, now and always.”

Joan shook her head. It was difficult for her, since she was arguing with herself as well as with Lynneth, trying to make her brain and her practical experience convince her instincts and her heart—and failing utterly.

“That feeling of yours won't last. Just can't last. You'll develop and change—you won't be able to help yourself. Fifteen or twenty years from now you won't be the girl who married Geoffrey Tressel; you'll have become an entirely different person. I'm not saying you ought to marry Danvers Calhoun now, or in the future either, for that matter. There'll be others. It's your mental attitude I'm talking about. You're keeping tight hold of what's past, you won't let yourself forget. You're fighting to retain your memories, and building on them, and making them count supremely—— Oh, my dear, my dear, I don't mean you haven't been brave and cheerful and hidden your sorrow! Indeed I don't!”

“I have tried, Joan, honestly I have! I hate people who go around with long faces, and depress everybody who comes near them. But forgetting—that's different.”

“You haven't been a bit lugubrious. No one who didn't know you as well as I do would have guessed—— But this is a world of compromises and the second best, Lynn! Recognition of that is proof you've grown up, shed your illusions, got used to looking squarely at things as they are. Oh, I know well enough I oughtn't to talk about making the second best do! Not now, when I have

—everything! There was a long time before, though, when I—when I'd have compromised gladly, Lynn!"

"I don't believe it," insisted Lynneth through bitten lips. "I can't believe it! You're wrong, quite wrong. Compromise in some things, yes; but in this—it's horrible! To forget Geoffrey, put another man in his place—it wouldn't be possible!"

"That's morbid, Lynn. The dead must give way to the living. For a while you're crushed. But you can't stay crushed, even if you want to. You've got to get up, and patch up, and go on. You've only one life to live, and it's your business to live it to the full, and not try to turn your back on half of it. Do you want to dry up, and grow narrow, and self-centred, and visionary? You've got to live in a normal, healthy way, with a normal, healthy point of view, if you're going to amount to anything worth while. You know just as well as I do that it's only the exceptional woman who can live by herself and for herself without getting small and inconsiderate and egotistical. It's a mighty difficult thing, and a mighty dreary thing, to live out your life alone, Lynn! Don't turn your back on everything because you can't have just what you want!"

Lynneth's hands were clasped together so tightly the knuckles showed white. Joan had put her one great fear into words.

"I know," she said slowly, "I know! That's why so many solitary women make idiots of themselves over dogs and cats, I suppose. We all want to come first with somebody or something, be loved best by something that's alive and can show how much it cares for us. I want that too, and——" She broke off. She had come first with Joan, once! With a little catch of her breath, she went on; "But if—if Geoff had gone on a long journey, you wouldn't urge me to forget him while he was away."

"If he'd gone on a long journey, there'd be a chance of his coming back to you. But, dear, as it is——"



"As it is, I'm his wife, now and always! Oh, if people really, truly believed the soul lives on when the body dies, they'd look on every second marriage as a confession of failure, an admission that the first was only a makeshift, or else that the survivor wasn't strong enough, didn't care enough to be loyal! Life"—she held her head well up now, and there was a white radiance on her face—"life isn't so terribly long, after all! It may be hard, and lonely, but when you've memories and love to help you——"

Slowly, and with a secret effort, Joan shook her head.

"That's what people always say, and think too, at first. It seems as if you could never smile again, never care for any one or anything again, but—you do. Look at the women—good women, fine women!—who've lost husbands they loved, and after a while found contentment with some other man, who's made a place of his own, a place for himself in their lives. I know you couldn't do that yet. I'm only trying to warn you. You're hypnotizing yourself. You're building on a foundation that's bound to decay, sooner or later, and crumble to pieces. You're wilfully shutting yourself out from the normal woman's life, the life you're best fitted for, trying to live in a world of your own, where memory and spirit are enough. They're not enough! You're trying to deny Time, and Nature, and all the experience of generations. Time will beat you in the end, Lynn!"

Lynneth shrank and shivered. This insistence that forgetting could not be prevented, that Time was an ally of Death against whose inexorable power she was helpless, was like a weight of stone she must throw off, or be slowly, pitilessly crushed to death.

"I know,"—the words were dull and toneless—"I know most people would say you were right. And yet—and yet——"

Joan had left the window-seat. She came now and put her arm about Lynneth.

"I feel like a brute, Lynn! I hate to hurt you so—but, oh, my dear, we're living on the earth, not up among the clouds! Facts are facts, Lynn, and death is death, and stronger than any of us. Humanity's a thing of flesh and blood; it can't live on spiritual food only. Don't starve yourself while you strain after an impossible ideal of loyalty! Change is the law. And some day—you'll change."

Then at last Lynne turned on her.

"If Roderick Malvin were to die, do you think you could forget him, and be contented with some one else?"

Joan winced. "No, I couldn't!" she replied honestly. Then tried to hedge, to ameliorate the too frank answer; "But, Lynn, I'm fifteen years older than you are. And while I may believe I couldn't, perhaps—well, perhaps I'm just like other people! Time——"

"Then Time's cruel!"

"Kind and cruel, both. It seems horrible to forget! But we do—we must. Partly, anyhow. It's the law; the world couldn't go on otherwise. You can't buck against Nature, Lynn. No use trying. And it isn't right, it isn't natural to make the very pivot of your life your memory of a man who is dead!"

## CHAPTER EIGHTH

"YOU'RE trying to deny Time and Nature and all the experience of generations. Time will beat you in the end!"

Now when it was all over, when the ceremony had been performed and the ship sailed away, conveying Joan and her husband on the first stage of their long journey, those words of hers beat in Lynneth's pulses.

It was late afternoon. Twilight dimmed the familiar rooms, so instinct with Joan's personality, it seemed as if you might at any moment turn to find her lounging lazily in her big easy chair. . . .

With an effort determined and deliberate, Lynneth looked about, looked from one familiar object to another, weighing, testing the bitter measure of her loneliness. The rapid ticking of the little clock on the tall bookcase stressed the stillness.

Emptiness. Silence. Solitude. Day after day, week after week, month after month. . . .

Then out of the shadowy corners, out of the silence and the solitude, crept the lurking, whispering fear;

What if she really were self-hypnotized? What if those moments of awareness of Geoffrey as being were but an illusion, the result of her longing, of the will to believe acting on the subconscious, of her pain-quickenèd imagination? What if Time and Death should defeat her in the end, dulling and then obliterating her memories, draining love away little by little, as water seeps into sand?

Was the world right? Was forgetfulness the everlasting law, and her determination to remember, to keep the



dead a living force in her life, only morbid fancy, born of grief and a sick and lonely heart?

A qualm of shuddering repugnance shot through her as she remembered how Danvers Calhoun, coming out of church that morning, had caught and pressed her hand, whispering hurriedly; "When am I to see you again? I've so much to say to you—Lynneth!"

Tone and manner left no room for doubt as to what it was he wanted to say! And Ashby Lawrence, standing nearby, had looked at them both with quizzical irony in his glance, but not one touch of surprise.

Aunt Honoria, Danvers Calhoun, Ashby Lawrence, Joan—each and every one of them took it more or less as a matter of course that the passing of the years would insure forgetfulness. Against the massed opinion of her little world she stood alone.

And against the belief of the larger world around and about it as well. Even the churches, however much they might disagree in ceremony or creed, were unanimous in declaring that death broke the marriage tie.

"Until death us do part."

She had said that; but she had never believed it. Nor had he. Had she been taken and he left, would he have forgotten? Would he have sorrowed and remembered for a little while, only to let her, at the last, slip helplessly out of his life? Would he even have said that acceptance of a lesser love could not "change the love still kept for Her"?

Every instinct within her cried out an indignant "No!"

And yet—and yet—who was she to stand against the massed verdict? To deny the authority of experience garnered through generations?

Was her very loyalty, then, a delusion, her strength weakness and folly, her struggle to reach across the void mere inability to face the truth?

Emptiness. Silence. Solitude. Day after day, week after week, month after month. . . .

Her head drooped. All her courage seemed to be slipping away from her——

She could not, would not let it go! Somehow, she must find an answer, definitely, once and for all, the answer on which her present and her future both depended! With a resolute, physical effort, she forced her head up. And it seemed to her as if in that brief interval the falling darkness had lifted a little, giving a vision as of wide spaces seen from a far-off hilltop.

It should be done there! There on the mountain-side above West Hillsdale, where she and Geoffrey had been together. There, if anywhere, she could reach to him; there, if anywhere, she would *know*!

This was Saturday. Tomorrow she was free. And a train left that night. By hurrying, she could get to the station in time. . . .

## CHAPTER NINTH

THE spring sun shone with faint and fragile warmth upon the road which wound like a thick white cord up the mountain. The air was full of the delicious fragrance of young growing things. The clustering tree-tops in the wooded valley below were of brighter, softer greens than those Lynneth remembered, making the pines beyond seem darker than ever. The road, winding upward, was a summons to adventure. . . .

Every inch of the way had its associations for Lynneth. And though she walked rapidly at first, her pace grew slower and slower as each tree and bush and boulder found and struck its own note in the exquisite harmony of her remembrances. Here was the once-muddy hollow, and the stone from which she had jumped; here the brave little brook, tinkling cheerily over brown stones, beneath ferns and dipping branches. Just beyond, stood the wasp-infested shack on whose doorstep she had sat that first radiant day. Not an inch of the way but was familiar—yet not an inch that was not subtly changed.

For spring's renewal held sway now, not summer's maturity.

On and on; up and up. Past the pool where the trout leaped, past the bench where they two had so often read or talked together. And at every turn and bend of the winding road it seemed as if Geoffrey must be waiting for her just beyond, smiling, beckoning her forward.

On and on; up and up. Alone now, where they had once walked together. The white birches gleamed nymph-like among the trees. The brook rippled softly, the birds chirped and sang. But Geoffrey's voice was hushed forever. . . .



Yet if every onward step brought new pain, it brought too a kind of solace. For they were all happy associations which went with her along the road. Youth triumphant, gallant and strong and debonair, instinct with the brave and joyous spirit of the springtime—youth was abidingly his. Sorrow could not touch him, nor sickness, nor old age, nor pain. He was safe from sadness and from disappointment—but oh, how he must have loved this roadside as it was now, when the buds were breaking into blossom and the wind was filled with the sweet odours of the young and teeming earth!

On the fence beside the grove of silver birches where they had rested together once, she rested alone now, her black dress sombre against the brilliance of the living green. Far down below, the sloping fields were white with daisies. Beyond, the well-remembered road grew rougher, more stony. It was the path she had trodden but once, the path leading to the house on the summit of the mountain.

And as she sat motionless in the silence and the solitude, mind and heart drenched with memories, there came to her a strange certainty that something, something she could experience but never express, was waiting for her, there where the storm had raged on her day of days. What its nature might be, whether of joy or comfort or dismay, she could not divine. But the certainty of it as waiting for her had been increasing, she was now aware, with her every forward step. She had chosen the mountain-top as the place where she would determine, once for all, the inner, spiritual life she was to lead. Now it was drawing her, drawing her to itself, that it might tell her—something! A strain of awe mingled with the growing excitement that put every nerve and every sense on the alert as she again began to climb.

On and on; up and up. Geoffrey, Geoffrey, beat every pulse in her body, every throb of her heart. Geoffrey, Geoffrey! The trees rustled his name, the birds sang it,

the sunshine bore it on every golden ray. Geoffrey, Geoffrey!

A twist in the road. And suddenly the ruined house confronted her as it had confronted her once before, the same, yet different—how amazingly different! For some wild clambering vine had grown over it, weaving a veil of young green leaves that all but hid the destruction and the charred blackness. Swallows were building their nests in the crumbling chimneys; about the broken doorstep clustered gay groups of dandelions and of buttercups.

With a sharp catch in her breath, Lynneth turned appealingly to the lightning-struck tree.

The bolt had cleft it like a giant sword, clear and clean. But it was not all dead. A part of it was putting forth fresh shoots. And over much of the rest, a wild grape vine was rapidly spreading its broad leaves.

Slowly, slowly, Lynneth looked from ruined tree to ruined house. And over them both was the young fresh splendour of the living green, the promise and the beauty of life renewed. And over them both, the spring sunshine poured its generous flood of liquid gold.

She drew a long, deep breath. There was a message, a message of vital importance for her here, if only she could read it! Thoughtfully she moved away, up the slope to the place among the rocks where they had leaned and talked together—that day.

She seated herself upon one of the stones, looking down at the undulating slopes, all white and gold now with daisies and dandelions, that stretched below, far below to where the cities were, to where her life, the present, physical life that must somehow be lived out to the end, lay awaiting her. And in the silence which was no silence at all, so interwoven was it with the stir and hum of those new lives the spring had called into being, she faced the questions, the doubts, that made her sick, and cold with fear. . . .

She had built her house of life upon her love for Geoffrey, never doubting but that she was building it on a rock no storms could shake. And now those she knew best and trusted most united to assure her that love was no rock, but unstable sand the winds of Time must inevitably scatter and sweep away. They asserted, and the massed opinion of the world echoed their assertion, that she was both wrong and foolish to foster memory. They declared that she was injuring herself, destroying her best possibilities, by centring all her thoughts and hopes and aspirations about the dead.

Were they, could they be right? Was she in truth wasting her life, self-hypnotized, self-deluded? Resolutely she faced that doubt, fearful to her beyond all telling. Not one hideous feature of it did she shut her eyes to, not one aspect of it did she flinch from regarding squarely.

With all her strength, she wanted to be the woman Geoffrey had thought her, to fulfil, as far as might be, all the possibilities he had seen, or imagined he saw in her. He had chosen her. As best she could, she must justify his choice. To stunt herself and her own nature would be, in a way, to injure and belittle him.

Was, then, her very holding to the past, her effort, not to forget but to cherish and develop every tiniest atom of memory, a kind of subtle disloyalty?

Must the old love, the old life, die, that new love, new life, might be born? Was this the message of the spring-time and the mountain-top?

Yet what could that new life be, either other or more than compromise? The black ugliness of lightning-struck tree and fire-swept house were graciously concealed by the fresh new growths—but the tree at least had once stood straight and strong and beautiful, with no need for such concealment!

Love could not last, they told her. The stored experience of the ages proclaimed that death severed all hu-



man companionships, that Time brought healing, brought unavoidable, inevitable oblivion. And yet—he had not thought so!

“The love that isn’t stronger than death, that can’t hold through and beyond death, may be very sweet, but it isn’t—magnificent!”

As if spoken close beside her, those often-recalled words of Geoffrey’s rang now in her ears. They stirred her heart like the cry of trumpets. And on one great wave of acceptance her whole being rushed to answer them. . . .

She did not know, she could not possibly know until the very end whether her love was great enough, whether she herself were capable of that magnificent love which is great enough to defy the allies Death and Time, proving itself the stronger. So far as she was concerned, it might be that those others spoke truth when they declared Time the sure and implacable conqueror. But it might also be that they were wrong.

And upon that chance, that might-be, she would stake and risk all she had. There lay her great adventure!

All her life, that life upon this homely earth which is the only one whose verity we mortals can absolutely prove, staked upon this chance, this great adventure to which the trumpet-call of Geoffrey’s remembered words had summoned her! No stunting of growth, but a development rooted in what had been—there for her was the message of the springtime and the mountain-top.

Change, compromise, were only for that which had been spoiled and blasted.

She did not know, she could not know; but upon the chance she would risk her all. Why should she expect, or even ask for complete knowledge? If she knew, knew with proved and mathematical certainty that her memories would never fade, her love never waver nor grow dim, but remain until the end what it was now,

then—why then there would be no risk, no great adventure, but only a waiting, resigned, quiescent. . . .

Instinctively she had risen and stood erect, head up, lips parted, eyes shining, cheeks aglow. What mattered it if there in that world stretching far below to which she must presently return, her outer life were poor and solitary and grey and very dreary? With love and memory held fast in her heart, with the daring and the consciousness of her great adventure thrilling through her veins, would she not have enough and more than enough, full measure and the brimming cup?

Geoffrey, Geoffrey!

Youth and strength, heart and soul and brain, all she had, all she was, all she could ever be—where were these rooted, if not in the love Death could not take from her, the love Time could not, should not destroy?

Defy Time and Nature?

Yes! And yes again, a thousand times! Geoffrey was hers, and she was his, forever and unchangeably! The death-built wall rose high between them, forbidding sight and sound and touch. But even without these, love could still exist!

On that faith she would build her future, the life she must live when she went down from the mountain-top, back into the valley.

Little and slim and black-garbed she stood with head held high, alone, proudly confident in the power of love to endure. And from somewhere, far down in a thicket, a bird began to sing.

Not suddenly, imperceptibly almost yet still swiftly, the tide of excitement which had been steadily rising within her swept to flood-heights. Nerves vibrated, pulses raced; unconsciously, she held her breath. . . .

And as she stood there, erect and valiant, ready to risk and to dare, ready to defy the forces before which so many bow, there came to her like dawning light, faintly

at first, then stronger, clearer, radiant at last, that tingling consciousness of Geoffrey's presence she had so often felt during his life-time.

She did not see anything, she did not hear anything. Yet she knew that he was with her now, with her in a communion closer even than the all but perfect companionship which had been theirs of old. Her eyes could not see him; her outstretched hands could not touch him; but her spirit thrilled, responding to his. And all unconsciously she spoke his name, aloud, yet softly, as to one who was very near:

"Geoffrey!"

Never would she be able to put this knowledge of hers into phrases, to argue about it or demonstrate its reality. But she had no doubts left. She believed, and was ready to stake everything on her belief that love can be stronger than Death and Time, can challenge them both, and emerge victorious.

With head held high and steadfast eyes, she made ready to descend from the mountain-top, prepared to follow so long as life should last the banner of her high adventure. And upon her and all about her the spring sunshine shed its golden glory.

END













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